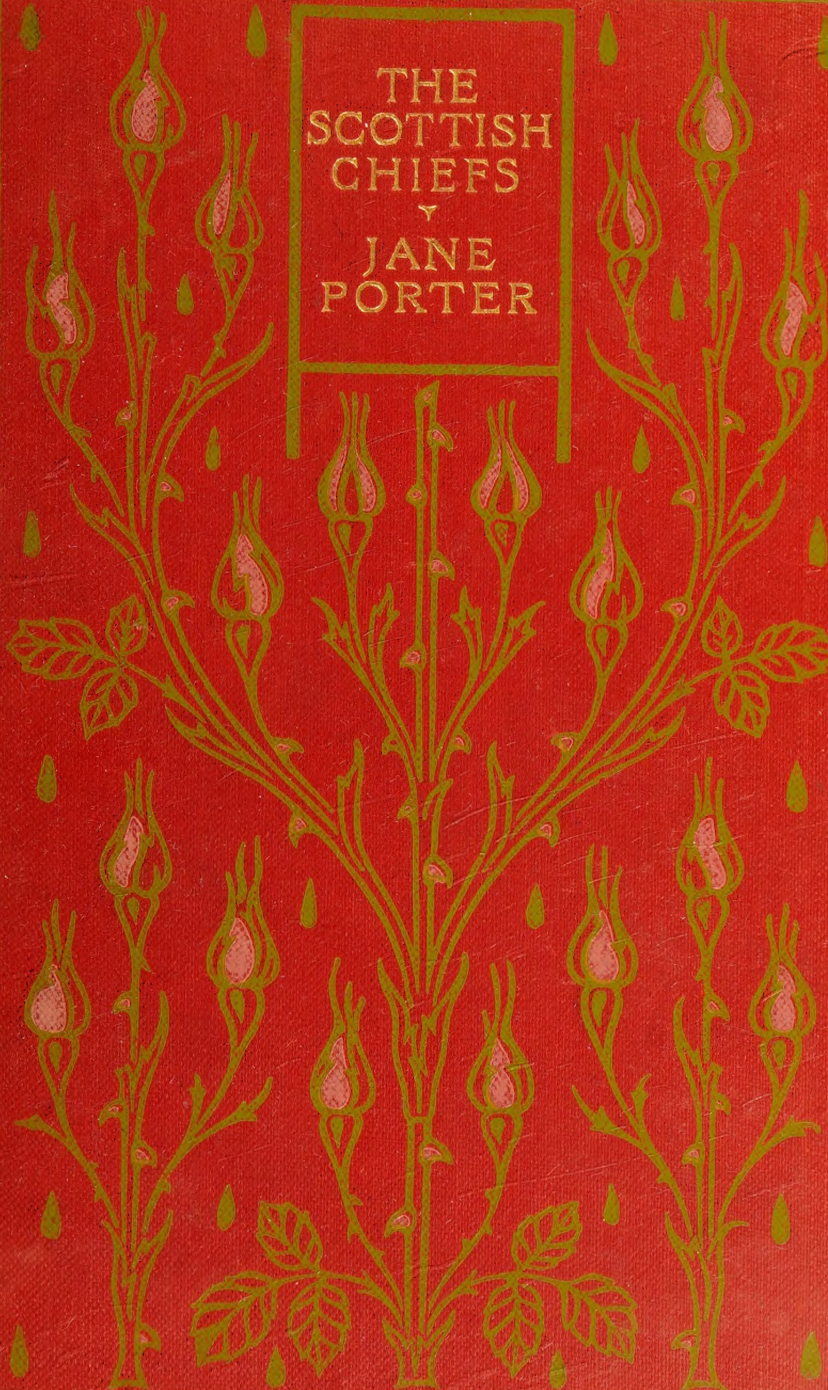
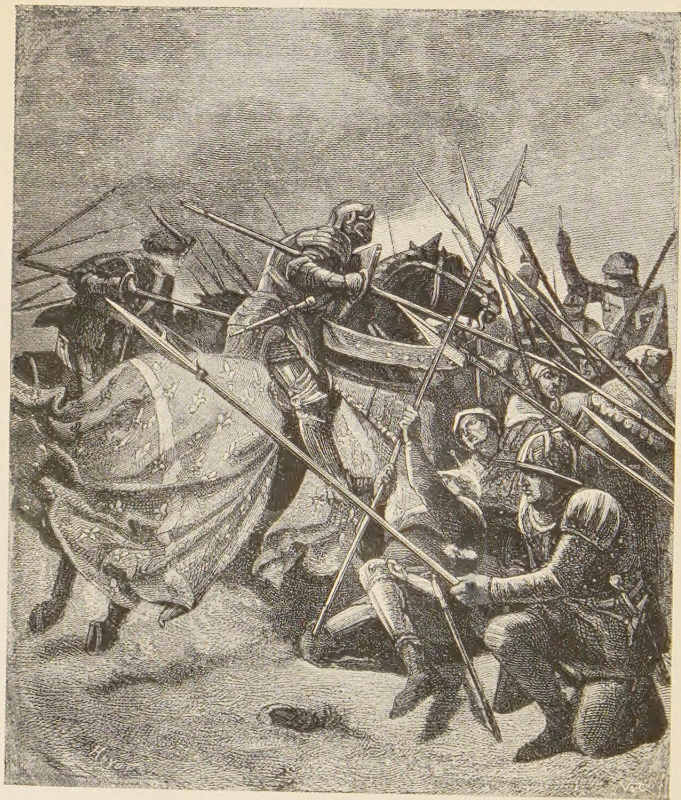


THE
SCOTTISH
CHIEFS
✓
JANE
PORTER





"Spurring his steed, he led the way to the bridge."

The Scottish Chiefs]

[Page 197

THE
SCOTTISH CHIEFS

BY
JANE PORTER

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PREFACE.

TO PAINT the portrait of one of the most complete heroes that ever filled the page of history may be a bold, though I hope not a vain, design. The contemplation of virtue is an improving, as well as a delightful, employment: and however inadequate this picture may be to represent its original—William Wallace of Scotland—yet, that it is a copy of such excellence, will be merit in the eyes of those who so love virtue as to venerate its shade.

I have spared no pains in consulting almost every writing extant which treats of the sister kingdoms during the period of my narrative. It would be tedious to swell this page with a list of these authorities; but all who are intimate with our old British historians must perceive, on reading the *Scottish Chiefs*, that in the sketch which history would have laid down for the biography of my principal hero, I have made no addition, excepting where time having made some erasure, a stroke was necessary to fill the space and unite the outline. Tradition has been a great assistance to me in this respect. And for much valuable information on the subject, I am indebted to the *Bard of Hope*, my friend Mr. Thomas Campbell—he who has so nobly mingled the poet's bays with the laurels of his clan.

While tracing the characters of my personages in the Scottish annals, it was with infinite pleasure I recognised those virtues in the fathers which had attached me to their posterity. Delighted with this most dear proof of kindred, I have fondly lingered over my work, re-enjoying in its visionary scenes hours fled to heaven. I have again discoursed and mingled my soul with friends whose nobility of spirit honoured the illustrious stems from which they sprang; but, like the blossomed bough torn from its branch, they are gone, and spread fragrance in my path no more.

It is now too common to condemn as nonsense even an honest pride in ancestry. But where is the Englishman who is not proud of being the countryman of Nelson? Where the British sailor who does not thirst to emulate his fame? Where the worthy

citizen who does not respect himself in the honourable memories of William Walworth and Sir Thomas Gresham?

If this sentiment be right, respect for noble progenitors cannot be wrong, for it proceeds from the same source,—the principle of kindred, of inheritance, and of virtue. Let the race of Douglas, or the brave line of the Percy, bear witness whether the name they hold be not as a mirror to show them what they ought to be, and to kindle in their hearts the flame which burnt in their fathers. Happy is it for this realm that the destiny which now unites the once contending arms of those brave families has also consolidated their rival nations into one, and by planting the heir of Plantagenet and of Bruce upon one throne, hath redeemed the peace of Britain, and fixed it on lasting foundations.

From the nature of my story, more agents have been used in its conduct than I should have adopted had it been a work of mere imagination. But very few persons wholly imaginary have been introduced; and wishing to keep as near historical truth as could be consistent with my plan, no intentional injustice has been committed against the characters of the individuals who were real actors with the chief hero of the tale. The melancholy circumstance which first excited him to draw his sword for Scotland, although it may be thought too much like the creation of modern romance, is recorded as a fact in the old poem of *Blind Harrie*. Other private events have been interwoven with the public subjects of those volumes, that the monotony of a continued series of warlike achievements might in some measure be lessened. Some notes are added to confirm the historical incidents, but finding that were they all marked such a plan would swell each volume beyond its proper size: in one word, I assure the reader that I seldom lead him to any spot in Scotland whither some written or oral testimony respecting my hero had not previously conducted myself. In the same spirit, being careful to keep to the line of chronology, I have not strayed from it in any instance, until my chief personages return from France; and then, my history being intended to be within the bounds of modern romance rather than measured by the folios of Scudery, I found myself obliged to take some liberties with time and circumstance; for both of which offences, and particularly for the management of my catastrophe, I hope the historical, if he be also a *gentle* reader, will find no difficulty in forgiving me.

J. P.

THE SCOTTISH CHIEFS.

CHAPTER I.

SCOTLAND.

BRIGHT was the summer of 1296. The war which had desolated Scotland was then at an end. Ambition seemed satiated ; and the vanquished, after having passed under the yoke of their enemy, concluded they might wear their chains in peace. Such were the hopes of those Scottish noblemen who, early in the preceding spring, had signed the bond of submission to a ruthless conqueror, purchasing life at the price of all that makes life estimable—liberty and honour.

Prior to this act of vassalage, Edward I., King of England, had entered Scotland at the head of an immense army. He seized Berwick by stratagem ; laid the country in ashes ; and, on the field of Dunbar, forced the Scottish king and his nobles to acknowledge him their liege lord.

But while the courts of Edward, or of his representatives, were crowded by the humbled Scots, the spirit of one brave man remained unsubdued. Disgusted alike at the facility with which the sovereign of a warlike nation could resign his people and his crown into the hands of a treacherous invader, and at the pusillanimity of the nobles who had ratified the sacrifice, William Wallace retired to the glen of Elderslie. Withdrawn from the world, he hoped to avoid the sight of oppressions he could not redress, and the endurance of injuries beyond his power to avenge.

Thus checked, at the opening of life, in the career of glory that was his passion, he repressed the eager aspirations of his mind, and strove to acquire that resignation to inevitable evils which alone could reconcile him to forego the promises of his youth, and enable him to view with patience a humiliation of Scotland, which blighted her honour, menaced her existence, and consigned her sons to degradation or obscurity. The

latter was the choice of Wallace. Too noble to bend his spirit to the usurper, too honest to affect submission, he resigned himself to the only way left of maintaining the independence of a true Scot; and giving up the world at once, all the ambitions of youth became extinguished in his breast, since nothing was preserved in his country to sanctify their fires. Scotland seemed proud of her chains.

During the happy months of the preceding autumn, while Scotland was yet free, and the path of honourable distinction still open before her young nobility, Wallace married Marion Braidfoot, the beautiful heiress of Lamington. Nearly of the same age, and brought up from childhood together, affection had grown with their growth; and sympathy of taste and virtues, and mutual tenderness, made them so entirely one, that when at the age of twenty-two the enraptured lover was allowed to pledge that faith publicly at the altar, which he had so often vowed in secret to his Marion, he clasped her to his heart, and softly whispered—"Dearer than life! part of my being! blessed is this union, that mingles thy soul with mine, now, and for ever!"

Edward's invasion of Scotland broke in upon their innocent joys. Wallace threw aside the wedding garment for the cuirass and the sword. But he was not permitted long to use either:—Scotland submitted to her enemies; and he had no alternative but to bow to her oppressors, or to become an exile from man, amid the deep glens of his country.

The tower of Elderslie was henceforth the lonely abode of himself and his bride. The neighbouring nobles avoided him, because the principles he declared were a tacit reproach on their proceedings; and in the course of a short time, as he forbore to seek them, they even forgot that he was in existence. Indeed, all occasions of mixing with society he now rejected. The hunting-spear with which he had delighted to follow the flying roebuck from glade to glade, the arrows with which he used to bring down the heavy ptarmigan or the towering eagle, all were laid aside. Scottish liberty was no more; and Wallace would have blushed to have shown himself to the free-born deer of his native hills, in communion of sports with the spoilers of his country.

Being resigned to bury his youth—since its strength could no longer be serviceable to his country—books, his harp, and the sweet converse of his tender Marion, became the occupa-

tions of his days. Elderslie was his hermitage; and there, closed from the world, with an angel his companion, he might have forgotten Edward was lord in Scotland had not that which was without his little paradise made a way to its gates, and showed him the slavery of the nobles and the wretchedness of the people. In these cases, his generous hand gave succour where it could not bring redress. Those whom the lawless plunderer had driven from their houses or stripped of their covering, found shelter, clothing, and food at the house of Sir William Wallace.

Elderslie was the refuge of the friendless, and the comfort of the unhappy. Wherever Lady Wallace moved, she had the rapture of hearing his steps greeted and followed by the blessing of the *poor destitute*, and the prayers of them who *were ready to perish*. It was then that this happy woman would raise her husband's hand to her lips, and, in silent adoration, thank God for blessing her with a being made so truly in His own image.

Wallace, who read her heart in this action, would reply—"Sweetest Marion, what merit has thy Wallace in mere benevolence? contracted is now my sphere of duty, and easily fulfilled. It is only to befriend the oppressed to the utmost of my power! And while tyranny leaves me that I shall not consider myself quite a slave. Were I useless to my fellow-creatures I should be miserable; for, in blessing others, I bless myself—I bless thee, my Marion! and the grateful countenances of these poor people add beauty even to thine! art thou not loveliest in my eyes at this moment, thou angel of peace and love! dost thou not praise thy husband, for what is common with thee?" She smiled, and a happy tear glittered in her eye. "To be lovely to thee, Wallace, is my joy; and to see thee so worthy of all my love, fills me indeed with an angel's happiness."

Several months of this blissful solitude had elapsed, when Lady Wallace saw a chieftain at her gate. He inquired for its master, and retired with him into a remote room. They remained together for an hour. Wallace then came forth, and ordering his horse, with four followers, to be in readiness, said he meant to accompany his guest to Douglas castle. When he embraced his wife at parting, he told her that as Douglas was only a few miles distant, he should be at home again before the moon rose.

She passed the tedious hours of his absence with tranquillity,

till the appointed signal of his return appeared from behind the summits of the opposite mountains. She dismissed her servants to their rest ; all, excepting Halbert, the grey-haired harper of Wallace ; and he, like herself, was too unaccustomed to the absence of his master to find sleep visit his eyes while Elderslie was bereft of its joy and its guard.

As the night advanced, Lady Wallace sat in the window of her bed-chamber, which looked towards the west. How often, as a cloud obscured for an instant the moon's light, and threw a transitory shade across the path, did her heart bound with the thought that her watching was at an end ! It was he whom she had seen start from the abrupt rock ! They were the folds of his tartan that darkened the white cliff ! But the moon again rolled through her train of clouds, and threw her light around. Where then was her Wallace ? Alas ! it was only a shadow she had seen ! the hill was still lonely, and he whom she sought was yet far away ! Overcome with watching, her eyes blinded with tears, and in a voice interrupted by sighs she exclaimed, " Not yet, not yet !—Ah, my Wallace, what evil hath betided thee ? "

Trembling with a nameless terror, she knew not what to dread. She believed that all hostile rencontres had ceased, when Scotland no longer contended with Edward. Opposition being over, nothing could then threaten her husband from the enemy ; and was not the person who had taken him from Elderslie a friend ?

Before Wallace's departure he had spoken to Marion alone ; he told her that the stranger was Sir John Monteith, the youngest son of the brave Walter Lord Monteith* who had been treacherously put to death by the English in the early part of the foregoing year. This young man was bequeathed by his dying father to the charge of his friend William Lord Douglas, at that time governor of Berwick. After the fall of that place and the captivity of its defender, Sir John Monteith had retired to Douglas castle, in the vicinity of Lanark, and was now the sole master of that princely residence ; James Douglas, the only son of its veteran lord, being still at Paris, whither he had been despatched, before the defeat at Dunbar,

* Walter Stewart, the father of Sir John Monteith, assumed the name and earldom of Monteith in right of his wife, the daughter and heiress of the preceding earl. When his wife died he married an Englishwoman of rank, who, finding him ardently attached to the liberties of his country, cut him off by poison, and was rewarded by the enemies of Scotland for this murder with the hand of a British nobleman.

to negotiate a league between the French monarch and the then King of Scots.

Informed of the privacy in which Wallace wished to live, Monteith had never ventured to disturb it until this day ; but knowing the honour of his old school companion, he came to entreat him, by the respect he entertained for the brave Douglas, and by his love for his country, that he would not refuse to accompany him to the brave exile's castle.

"I have a secret to disclose to you," said he, "which cannot be divulged on any other spot."

Wallace, as has been said before, consented ; and accordingly was conducted by Monteith towards Douglas.

While descending the heights which led to the castle, Monteith kept a profound silence ; and when crossing the draw-bridge which lay over the water at its base, he put his finger to his lips, in token to the servants for equal caution. This was explained as they entered the gate and looked around. It was guarded by English soldiers. Wallace started and would have drawn back ; but Monteith laid his hand on his arm, and whispered, "For your country !" At these words, a spell to the ear of Wallace, he proceeded ; and his attendants followed into the courtyard.

The sun was just setting as Monteith led his friend into the absent earl's room. Its glowing reflection on the distant hills reminded Wallace of the stretch he had to retread to reach his home before midnight ; and thinking of his anxious Marion, he awaited with impatience the development of the object of his journey.

Monteith closed the door, looked fearfully around for some time ; then, trembling at every step, approached Wallace. When drawn quite near, in a low voice he said, "You must swear upon the cross that you will keep inviolate the secret I am going to reveal."

Wallace put aside the hilt of the sword which Monteith presented to receive his oath. "No," said he, with a smile, "I take no oaths. In these times I will not bind my conscience on subjects I do not know. If you dare trust the word of a Scotsman and a friend, speak out ; and if the matter be honest, my honour is your pledge."

"You will not swear ?"

"No."

"Then I must not trust you."

"Then our business is at an end," returned Wallace, rising, "and I may return home."

"Stop!" cried Monteith. "Forgive me, my old companion, that I have dared to hesitate, but the nature of the confidence reposed in me will, I hope, convince you that I ought not to share it rashly. Of any one but you, I would exact oaths on oaths; but your word is given, and on that I rely. Await me here."

Monteith unlocked a door which had been concealed by the tapestry; and after a short absence re-entered with a small iron box. He set it on the table near his friend, then went to the great door, which he had before so carefully closed, tried that the bolts were secure, and returned with a still more pallid countenance, towards the table. Wallace, surprised at so much precaution, and at the extreme apprehension visible in these actions, awaited with wonder the promised explanation. Monteith sat down with his hand on the box, and fixing his eyes on it, began:—"I am going to mention a name, which you may hear with patience, since its power is no more. The successful rival of Bruce, and the enemy of your family, is now a prisoner in the Tower of London."

"Baliol?"

"Yes," answered Monteith; "and his present sufferings will, perhaps, soften your indignation at his vindictive resentment of the injury he received from Sir Ronald Crawford."

"My grandfather never injured him, nor any man!" interrupted Wallace: "Sir Ronald Crawford was as incapable of injustice as of flattering the minions of his country's enemy. But Baliol is fallen, and I forgive him."

"Did you witness his degradation," returned Monteith, "you would even pity him."

"I always pity the wicked," continued Wallace; "and as you seem ignorant of the cause of his enmity against Sir Ronald and myself, in justice to the character of that most venerable of men, I will explain it. I first saw Baliol four years ago, when I accompanied my grandfather to witness the arbitration of the King of England between the two contending claimants for the Scottish crown. Sir Ronald came on the part of Bruce. I was too young to have a voice in the council; but I was old enough to understand what was passing there, and to perceive, in the crouching demeanour with which Baliol received the crown, that it was the price for which he sold his country. However, as Scotland acknowledged him sovereign,

and as Bruce submitted, my grandfather silently acquiesced. But Baliol did not forget former opposition. His behaviour to Sir Ronald and myself at the beginning of this year, when, according to the privilege of our birth, we appeared in the field against the public enemy, fully demonstrated what was the *injury* Baliol complains of, and how unjustly he drove us from the standard of Scotland. 'None,' said he, 'shall serve under me, who presumed to declare themselves the friends of Bruce.' Poor weak man! The purchased vassal of England; yet so vain of his ideal throne, he hated all who had opposed his elevation, even while his own treachery sapped its foundation! And now that I have cleared my grandfather's name of such calumny, I am ready to hear you further."

Monteith, after remarking on the well-known honour of Sir Ronald Crawford, resumed.

"During the massacre at the capture of Berwick, Lord Douglas, wounded, and nearly insensible, was taken by a trusty band of Scots out of the citadel and town. I followed him to Dunbar, and witnessed with him that day's dreadful conflict, which completed the triumph of the English. When the few nobles who survived the battle dispersed, Douglas took the road to Forfar, hoping to meet King Baliol there, and to concert with him new plans of resistance. When we arrived, we found his majesty in close conversation with the Earl of Athol,* who had persuaded him the disaster at Dunbar was decisive, and that if he wished to save his life, he must immediately go to the King of England, then at Montrose, and surrender himself to his mercy.

"Douglas tried to alter Baliol's resolution, but without effect. The king could not return any reasonable answers to the arguments which were offered to induce him to remain, but continued to repeat, with groans and tears, 'It is my fate.' Athol sat knitting his brows during this conversation; and at last throwing out some sullen remarks to Lord Douglas on the vehemence with which he exhorted the king to defy his liege lord, he abruptly left the room.

"As soon as he was gone, Baliol rose from his seat with a very anxious countenance, and taking my patron into an adjoining room, they continued there a few minutes, and then re-entered, Douglas bearing with him this iron box. 'Mon-

* This treacherous Scot, who persuaded Baliol to his ruin, was John Cummin, of Strathbogie, Earl of Athol in right of his wife, the heiress of that earldom.

teith,' said he, 'I confide this to your care,' putting the box under my arm, and concealing it within a cloak. 'Carry it,' continued he, 'directly to my castle in Lanarkshire. I will rejoin you there in four-and-twenty hours after your arrival. Meanwhile, by your affection for me, and fidelity to your king, breathe not a word of what has passed.'

"'Look on that and be faithful!' said Baliol, putting this ruby ring on my finger. I withdrew with the haste his look indicated; and as I crossed the outward hall, was met by Athol. He eyed me sternly, and inquired whither I was going. I replied, 'To Douglas, to prepare for the coming of its lord.' The hall was full of armed men in Athol's colours. Athol looked round on his myrmidons: 'Here,' cried he, 'see that you speed this fellow on his journey. We shall provide lodgings for his master.' I foresaw danger to Lord Douglas, but I durst not attempt to warn him of it; and to secure my charge, I hastened into the courtyard, and, being permitted to mount my horse, set off at full speed.

"On arriving at this place, I remembered that secret closet, and carefully deposited the box within it. A week passed without any tidings of Lord Douglas. However, I still flattered myself, notwithstanding the menace of Athol, that by some means he might escape the snare, and reach his castle. But the arrival of a message from him dissipated all my hopes. A pilgrim appeared at the gate and requested to see me alone; fearing nothing from a man in so sacred a habit, I admitted him. Presenting me with a packet which had been intrusted to him by Lord Douglas, he told me my patron had been forcibly carried on board a vessel at Montrose, to be conveyed with the unhappy Baliol to the Tower of London. Douglas, on this outrage, sent to the monastery at Aberbrothick, and under the pretence of making a religious confession before he sailed, begged a visit from the subprior. 'I am that prior,' continued the pilgrim, 'and having been born on the Douglas lands, he well knew the claim he had to my fidelity. He gave me this packet, and conjured me to lose no time in conveying it to you. The task was difficult; and, as in these calamitous seasons we hardly know whom to trust, I determined to execute it myself.'

"I inquired whether Lord Douglas had actually sailed. 'Yes,' replied the father; 'I stood on the beach till the ship disappeared.'"

A half-stifled groan burst from the indignant breast of Wallace. It interrupted Monteith, but without noticing it he proceeded :—

“Not only the brave Douglas was then wrested from his country, with our king, but also that holy pillar of Jacob,* which prophets have declared to be the palladium of Scotland!”

“What!” inquired Wallace, with a yet darker frown, “has Baliol robbed Scotland of that trophy of one of her best kings? Is the sacred gift of Fergus to be made the spoil of a coward?”

“Baliol is not the robber,” rejoined Monteith; “the hallowed pillar was taken from Scone by the command of the king of England, and, with the sackings of Iona, was carried on board the same vessel with the betrayed Douglas. The archives of the kingdom have also been torn from their sanctuary, and were thrown by Edward’s own hands into the fire.”

“Do the traitors think,” cried Wallace, “that by robbing Scotland of her annals and of that stone they really deprive her of her palladium? Scotland’s history is in the memories of her sons; her palladium is in their hearts; and Edward may one day find that she remembers the victory of Largs,† and needs not talismans to give her freedom.”

“Alas! not in our time!” answered Monteith. “The spear is at our breasts, and we must submit. You see this castle is full of Edward’s soldiers. Every house is a garrison for England—but more of this by-and-by; I have yet to tell you the contents of the packet which the monk brought. It contained two others. One packet to Sir James Douglas, at Paris, and the other to me. I read as follows :—

“‘Athol has persuaded Baliol to his ruin, and betrayed me into the hands of Edward. I shall see Scotland no more.

* The tradition respecting this stone is as follows :—Hiber, or Iber the Phœnician, who came from the Holy Land to inhabit the coast of Spain, brought this sacred relic along with him. From Spain he transplanted it with the colony he sent to people the south of Ireland: and from Ireland it was brought into Scotland by the great Fergus, the son of Ferchard. He placed it in Argyleshire; but Mac Alpine removed it to Scone, and fixed it in the royal chair in which all the succeeding kings of Scotland were inaugurated. Edward I. of England caused it to be carried to Westminster Abbey, where it now stands. The tradition is, that empire bides where it stays.

† This battle was fought by Alexander III. on the 1st of August, 1263, against Acho, King of Norway. That monarch invaded Scotland with a large army and drew up his forces before Largs, a town in Ayrshire. He met with a great defeat, and, covered with disgrace, retired to his own country. Wallace’s father signalled himself on that field.

Send the enclosed to my son at Paris ; it will inform him what is the last wish of William Douglas for his country. The iron box I confided to you, guard as your life, until you can deposit it with my son. But should he remain abroad, and you ever be in extremity, commit the box in strict charge to the worthiest Scot you know ; and tell him *that it will be at the peril of his soul, who dares to open it, till Scotland be again free !* When that hour comes, then let the man by whose valour God restores her rights, receive the box as *his own* : for by him only is it to be opened.

“ ‘Monteith, as you would not disgrace the memory of your noble father, and as you hope for honour here, or happiness hereafter, attend to these injunctions of your friend
“DOUGLAS.’ ”

Monteith finished reading the letter, and remained silent. Wallace, who had listened to it with increasing indignation against the enemies of Scotland, spoke first :—“Tell me in what I can assist you ; or how serve these last wishes of the imprisoned Douglas ? ”

Monteith replied by reading over again this sentence—“ ‘Should my son remain abroad, and you ever be in extremity, commit the box in strict charge to the worthiest Scot you know.’ I am in that extremity now. Edward determined on desolation, when he placed English governors throughout our towns ; and the rapacious Heselrigge, his representative in Lanark, has just issued an order for the houses of all the absent chiefs to be searched for records and secret correspondences. Two or three in the neighbourhood have already gone through this ordeal, but the event has proved that it was not papers they sought, but plunder, and an excuse for dismantling the castles, or occupying them with English officers.

“The soldiers you saw were sent, by daybreak this morning, to guard this castle till Heselrigge could in person be present at the examination. This ceremony is to take place to-morrow ; and as Lord Douglas is considered a traitor to Edward, I am told the place will be sacked to its walls. In such an *extremity*, to you, noble Wallace, as to *the worthiest Scot I know*, I apply to take charge of this box. Within the remote cliffs of Elderslie it must be safe ; and when James Douglas arrives from Paris, to him you will resign it.”

Wallace made no difficulty in granting Monteith's request ;

and, there being two iron rings on each side of his charge, the young chief took off his leathern belt, and putting it through them, swung the box easily under his left arm, while covering it with his plaid.

Monteith's eyes now brightened, and with a firmer step, as if suddenly relieved of a heavy load, he called a servant to prepare Sir William Wallace's attendants.

While Wallace shook him by the hand, Monteith, in a low and solemn voice, exhorted him to caution respecting the box. "Remember," added he, "the penalty that hangs over him who looks into it."

"Be not afraid," answered Wallace; "even the outside shall never be seen by other eyes than my own, unless the same circumstance which now induces you, *mortal extremity*, should force me to confide it to safer hands."

"Beware of that!" exclaimed Monteith; "for who is there that would adhere to the prohibition as I have done—as you will do? and besides, as I have no doubt it contains holy relics, who knows what new calamities a sacrilegious look might bring upon our already devoted country?"

"Relics or no relics," replied Wallace, "it would be an equal sin against good faith to invade what is forbidden: but from the weight I am rather inclined to suspect it contains gold; probably a treasure, with which the sordid Baliol thinks to compensate the hero who may free his country, for all the miseries a traitor king and a treacherous usurper have brought upon it."

"A treasure!" repeated Monteith; "I never thought of that—it is indeed heavy!—and, as we are responsible for the contents of the box, I wish we were certain of what it contains; let us consider that!"

"It is no consideration of ours," returned Wallace. "With what is in the box we have no concern: all we have to do is to preserve the contents unviolated by even our own eyes; and to that, as you have now transferred the charge to me, I pledge myself—farewell."

"But why this haste!" rejoined Monteith; "indeed I wish I had thought—stay only a little."

"I thank you," returned Wallace, proceeding to the courtyard; "but it is now dark, and I promised to be at home before the moon rises. If you wish me to serve you further, I shall be happy to see you at Elderslie to-morrow. My Marion

will have pleasure in entertaining, for days or weeks, the friend of her husband."

While Wallace spoke, he advanced to his horse, to which he was lighted by the servants of the castle. A few English soldiers lingered about in idle curiosity. A murmur was heard, as if of some intention to follow him; but deeming it prudent to leave the open and direct road, because of the English marauders who swarmed there, he was presently lost amid the thick shades of Clydesdale.

CHAPTER II.

LANARK.

THE darkness was almost impenetrable. Musing on what had passed with Monteith, Wallace rode on till, crossing the bridge of Lanark, he saw the rising moon silver the tops of the distant hills; and then his meditations embraced a gentler subject. This was the time he had promised Marion he should be returned, and he had yet five long miles to go, before he could reach the glen of Elderslie; he thought of her being alone—of watching, with an anxious heart, the minutes of his delay. Scotland and its wrongs he now forgot, in the idea of her whose happiness was dearer to him than life. He could not achieve the deliverance of the one, but it was his bliss to preserve the peace of the other; and putting spurs to his horse, he hastened through the town.

Abruptly turning an angle leading to the Mouse river, a cry of murder arrested his ear. He checked his horse and listened. The clashing of arms told him the sound had issued from an alley to the left. He alighted in an instant, and drawing his sword, threw away the scabbard (prophetic omen!); then, leaving his horse with one of his servants, hastened, with the other three, to the spot whence the noise proceeded.

On arriving, he discovered two men in tartans, with their backs to the opposite wall, furiously assaulted by a throng of Edward's soldiers. At this sight, the Scots who accompanied Wallace were so enraged that, blowing their bugles to encourage the assailed, they joined hand to hand with their gallant leader, and attacking the banditti, each man cut his opponent to the ground.

Such unexpected assistance reanimated one of the two, from whom the cry had issued. He sprang from the wall with the vigour of a tiger, but at the moment received a wound in his back, which would have thrown him at the feet of his enemies, had not Wallace caught him in his left arm, and with his right cleared the way, while he cried to his men who were fighting near him—"To the Glen!" As he spoke, he threw the now insensible stranger into their arms. The other man, whose voice had first attracted Wallace, at that instant sunk, covered with blood, on the pavement.

Two of the servants, obeying their master, carried their senseless burden towards the horses; but the third, being hemmed in by the furious soldiers, could not move. Wallace made a passage to his rescue, and effected it; but one base wretch, while the now wounded Scot was retreating, made a stroke which would have severed his head from his body, had not the trusty claymore of Wallace struck down the weapon of the coward, and received his rushing body upon its point. He fell with bitter imprecations, calling aloud for vengeance.

A dreadful cry was now raised by the whole band of assassins: "Murder! treason! Arthur Heselrigge is slain!" The uproar became general. The windows of the adjoining houses were thrown open; people armed and unarmed issued from their doors, and pressed forward to inquire the cause of the alarm. Wallace was nearly overpowered; a hundred swords flashed in the torchlight; but at the moment he expected they would be sheathed in his heart, the earth gave way under his feet, and he sunk into utter darkness.

He fell upon a quantity of gathered broom; and concluding that the weight of the thronging multitude had burst his way through the arch of a cellar, he sprung on his feet: and though he heard the curses of several wretches, who had fallen with him and fared worse, he made but one step to a half-opened door, pointed out to him by a gleam from an inner passage.

The oaths of the soldiers, enraged at his escape, echoed in his ears till distance sunk them into hoarse murmurs. He pursued his way over the craigs; through the valley, and across the river, to the cliffs which embattle the garden of Elderslie. Springing on the projecting point of the nearest, he leaped into a thicket of honeysuckles. This was the favourite bower of his Marion! The soft perfume, as it saluted the senses, seemed to breathe peace and safety; and as he emerged

from its fragrant embrace, he walked with a calmer step towards the house. He approached a door which led into the garden. It was open. He beheld his beloved leaning over a couch, on which was laid the person he had rescued. Halbert was dressing his wounds.

Wallace paused for a moment to contemplate his lovely wife in this more lovely act of charity. Her beautiful hands held a cup to the lips of the stranger; while her long hair, escaped from its band, fell in jetty ringlets, and mingled with his silver locks.

"Marion!" exclaimed the overflowing soul of her husband. She looked up at the well-known sound, and with a cry of joy, rushing forward, threw herself into his arms: her tears flowed, she sobbed—she clung to his breast. It was the first time Wallace had been from her; she had feared it would have been the last. The hour—the conflict—the bleeding stranger! But now he was returned—he was safe!

"Art thou indeed here!" exclaimed she. Blood fell from his forehead upon her face and bosom. "O, my Wallace!" cried she in agony,

"Fear not, my love! all is well, since our wounded countryman is safe."

"But you bleed!" returned she.

"I hope my preserver is not hurt?" inquired the stranger.

"Oh, no!" replied Wallace, putting back the hair from his forehead; "a mere trifle!" That the action had discovered the gash to be wider than he thought, he saw in the countenance of his wife! She turned deadly pale. "Marion," said he, "to convince you how causeless your fears are, you shall cure me yourself, and with no other surgery than your girdle!"

When Lady Wallace heard his gay tone, and saw the unforced smiles on his lips, she took courage, and began to hope that she need not now fear for the object dearest to her in existence. Rising from her husband's arms, with a languid smile she unbound the linen fillet from her waist; and Halbert having poured some balsam into the wound, she prepared to apply the bandage; but when she lifted her husband's hair from his temple, when the clotted blood met her fingers a mist seemed to pass over her sight; she paused for a moment; but rallying her strength, as the cheerful sound of his voice conversing with his guest assured her fear was groundless, she tied the fillet; and, stealing a soft kiss on his cheek when she had finished, she seated herself, yet trembling, by his side.

"Gallant Wallace!" continued the stranger—agitation had prevented her hearing what had preceded this—"It is Donald, Earl of Mar, who owes his life to you."

"Then blessed be my arm," exclaimed Wallace, "that has preserved a life so precious to my country!"

"May it indeed be blest!" cried Lord Mar; "for this night it has made the Southrons feel there is yet one man in Scotland who does not fear to resist oppression, and to punish treachery."

"What treachery?" inquired Lady Wallace, her alarmed spirit still hovering about her soul's far dearer part: "is any meant to my husband?"

"None to Sir William Wallace, more than to any other brave Scot," replied the Earl; "but we all see the oppression of our country; we all know the treachery by which it was subjugated; and this night, in my own person, I have felt the effects of both. The English at Lanark despatched a body of men to Bothwell Castle on a plea that as its lord is yet absent, they presume he is adverse to Edward; and therefore they must search his dwelling for documents to settle the point. Considering myself the representative of my brother-in-law, Lord Bothwell, and suspecting that this might be only a private marauding party, I refused to admit the soldiers; and saw them depart, swearing to return the next day with a stronger force, and storm the castle. To be ascertained of their commission, and to appeal against such unprovoked tyranny should it be true, I followed the detachment to Lanark."

"I saw Heselrigge, the governor. He avowed the transaction; but, awed by the power which he thinks I possess in the country, he consented to spare Bothwell while I and my family remain in it. It being nearly dark, I took my leave, and was proceeding towards my servants in the courtyard, when a young man accosted me. I recognised him to be the officer who had commanded the party I had driven from the castle. Heselrigge having told me that he was his nephew, I made no hesitation to go back with him, when he informed me that his uncle had forgotten to communicate something of importance, and begged me to return. I followed his steps; but instead of conducting me to the room in which I had conversed with Heselrigge, he led me along a dark passage into a small apartment, where, telling me his uncle would attend me, he suddenly retreated out of the door, and before I could recollect myself, I heard him bolt it after him."

“ I now saw myself a prisoner ; and alarmed at what might be intended to my defenceless family, I made every essay to force the door, but it was vain. Driven to despair, I remained in a state of mind not to be described, when the bolt was undrawn, and two men entered, with manacles in their hands. They attempted to seize me, telling me I was the prisoner of King Edward. I did not listen further, but wounding one with my dagger, felled the other to the ground ; and, darting past him, made my way through what passages I cannot tell, till I found myself in a street leading from behind the governor’s house. I ran against some one as I rushed from the portal ; it was my servant Neil. I hastily told him to draw his sword and follow me. We then hurried forward ; he telling me he had stepped out to observe the night, while the rest of my men were awaiting me in the house, wondering at my delay.

“ Rejoiced at my escape, and fearing the worst of consequences from the treachery of Heselrigge, I was hastening onward, determined to pursue my way on foot to the protection of my family, when, at the turning of an angle which leads to the Bothwell road, we were surrounded by armed men. The moon shone full on their faces, and I discovered they were Southrons, and that young Heselrigge was at their head.

“ He aimed a blow at my head with his battle-axe, and in a voice of triumph exclaimed to his soldiers, ‘ The plunder of Bothwell, my lads ! Down with its lord ! all but the lady Helen shall be yours ! ’

“ In a moment every sword was directed towards me. They wounded me in several places ; but the thought of my daughter gave supernatural vigour to my arm, and I defended myself till the cries of my servant brought you, my brave deliverer, to my rescue. But, while I am safe, perhaps my treacherous pursuer has marched towards Bothwell, too sure to commit the horrid violence he meditates : there are none to guard my child but a few domestics, the unpractised sword of my stripling nephew, and the feeble arms of my wife.”

“ Be easy on that head,” interrupted Wallace : “ I believe the infamous leader of the banditti fell by my hand, for the soldiers made an outcry that Arthur Heselrigge was killed ; and then pressing on me to take revenge, their weight broke a passage into a vault, through which I escaped——”

“ Save, save yourself, my master ! ” cried a man rushing in

from the garden ; “ you are pursued : save, save—” while he spoke, he fell, insensible, at Wallace’s feet. The chief perceived that it was Dugald ; he whom he had rescued from the blow of Heselrigge, and who, from the bleeding of his wounds and consequent debility, had been all this while reaching Elderslie.

Wallace had hardly time to give him to the care of Halbert, when the voice of war assailed his ears. The tumult of men demanding admittance, and the terrific sound of spears rattling against the shields of their owners, told the astonished group within that the house was beset by armed foes.

“ Blood for blood ! ” cried a horrid voice, which penetrated the almost palsied senses of Lady Marion. “ Vengeance on Wallace for the murder of Heselrigge ! ”

“ Fly, fly ! ” cried she, looking wildly at her husband.

“ Whither ? ” answered he, supporting her in his arms. “ Would this be a moment to leave you, and our wounded guest ? I must meet these assailants.”

“ Not now ! ” cried Lord Mar. “ Hear you not how numerous they are ? Mark that shout ! they thirst for blood. If you have love for your wife, or regard for me, delay not a moment. Again—” The uproar redoubled, and Wallace, turning to the earl, who continued to enforce the necessity of his flight, repeated, that he would not consent to leave his wife in such a tumult.

“ Leave me,” cried she, in an inarticulate voice, “ or see me die.” As she spoke, there was a violent crash, and a tremendous burst of imprecations. Three of Wallace’s men ran panting into the room. Two of the assailants had climbed to the hall window ; and had just been thrown back upon the cliffs, where one was killed. “ Conceal yourself,” said the Scots to Wallace ; “ for in a few minutes more your men will not be able to maintain the gates.”

“ Yes, my dear lord,” cried Halbert, “ there is the dry well at the end of the garden, at the bottom of that you will be safe.”

“ By your love for me, Wallace, hearken to him ! ” cried Lady Marion, falling at his feet, and clasping his knees. “ I kneel for my life in kneeling for yours ! Pity your unborn child ! Fly, Wallace, fly, if you would have me live ! ” She was pale and breathless.

“ Angel of my life ! ” exclaimed Wallace, straining her to his heart, “ I obey thee. But if the hand of one of these desperate robbers dare to touch thy hallowed person——”

"Think not so, my lord," interrupted Halbert; "it is you they seek. Not finding you, they will be too eager in pursuit to molest your lady. I will preserve her from affront at the peril of my life."

"I shall be safe," whispered Marion; "only fly—while you are here their shouts kill me."

"But thou shalt go with me," returned he; "the well will contain us all. But first let our faithful Halbert and these honest fellows lower Lord Mar into the place of refuge. He being the cause of the affray, if discovered, would be immediately sacrificed."

Lord Mar acquiesced; and while the contention was so loud without, as to threaten the tearing down of the walls, the earl was carried into the garden.

At the well-side they found the earl bound with the rope that was to lower him to the bottom. By great care it was safely done; and the cord being brought up again, before it was tied round Wallace (for his agonised wife insisted he should descend next), he recollected that the iron box at his side might hurt the wounded nobleman by striking him in his descent; and, unbuckling it, he said it contained matters of great value, and ordered it to be lowered first.

Lord Mar, beneath, was releasing it from the rope, when a shout of triumph pierced their ears. A party of the English, having come round the heights, had leaped the wall of the garden, and were within a few yards of the well. For Wallace to descend now was impossible. "That tree!" whispered Marion, pointing to an oak near which they stood. As she spoke, she slid from his arms, and along with the venerable Halbert, who had seized her hand, disappeared amid the adjoining thicket. The two servants fled also.

Wallace, finding himself alone, the next instant, like one of his native eagles, was looking down from the towering top of the wood upon his enemies. They passed beneath him, denouncing vengeance upon the *assassin of Arthur Heselrigge!* One, who by the brightness of his armour seemed to be their leader, stopped under the tree, and complained he had so sprained his ankle in leaping the wall, he must wait a few moments to recover himself. Several soldiers drew towards him; but he ordered them to pursue their duty, search the house, and bring Wallace, dead or alive, before him.

They obeyed; but others, who had gained admittance to the

tower through the now forced gates, soon ran to him with information that the murderer could nowhere be found.

"But here is a gay lady," cried one; "perhaps she can tell of his hiding-place." And at that moment Marion, with Halbert, appeared amongst a band of men. The lighted torches, which the soldiers held, shone full on her face. Though pale as monumental marble, the exquisite beauty of her features, and the calm dignity which commanded from her eyes, awed the officer into respect and admiration.

"Soldiers, stand back!" cried he, advancing to Lady Wallace. "Fear not, madam." As the words passed his lips, a flight of arrows flew into the bosom of the tree. A piercing shriek from Marion was her only answer. "Ha! my lady's falcon!" cried Halbert, alarmed, doubly, for the fate of his master. A sudden agitation of the branches having excited an indefinite suspicion in a body of archers who stood near, with one impulse they had discharged their arrows to the spot. Halbert's ready excuse, both for the disturbance in the tree and his lady's shriek, was prompted and warranted true by the appearance of a large bird, which the rushing of the arrows had frightened from her nest; she rose suddenly from amongst the branches, and soared away with loud screams.

All being again still, Marion hoped that her husband had escaped any serious injury from the arrows; and turning with recovered composure to the officer, heard him, with a glow of comfort, reprimand his men for daring to draw their bows without his orders. Then addressing her, "I beg your pardon, madam," said he, "both for the alarm these hot-headed men have occasioned you, and for the violence they have committed in forcing one of your sex and beauty before me. Had I expected to have found a lady here, I should have issued orders to have prevented this outrage; but I am sent hither in quest of Sir William Wallace, who, by a mortal attack made on the person of the governor of Lanark's nephew, has forfeited his life. The scabbard of his sword, found beside the murdered Heselrigge, is an undeniable proof of his guilt. Direct us to find him, and not only release but the favour of the English monarch will await your allegiance."

"I am Sir William Wallace's wife," returned the gentle Marion, in a firm tone; "and by what authority you seek him thus, and presume to call him guilty, I cannot understand."

"By the authority of laws, madam, which he has violated."

"What laws?" rejoined she; "Sir William Wallace acknowledges none but those of God and his country. Neither of these has he transgressed."

The officer replied—"This night he assassinated Arthur Heselrigge in the streets of Lanark; and that condemns him, by the last declaration of King Edward:—'*Whatever Scot maltreats any one of the English soldiers, or civil officers, garrisoned in the towns of Scotland, shall thereby forfeit his life, as the penalty of his crime.*'"

"A tyrant's law, sir, to which no freeborn Scot will submit. That the governor's nephew fell was a just retribution for heading so unequal a contest, and no crime in Sir William Wallace; for he slew him to preserve a feeble old man who had a hundred English swords levelled at his life."

The officer paused for a moment, and then ordering his soldiers to fall further back, when they were at a sufficient distance he offered to take Lady Wallace's hand. She withstood his motion with a reserved air, and said, "Speak, sir, what you would say, or allow me to retire."

"I meant not to offend you, noble lady," continued he: "had I a wife so lovely as yourself, and I in like circumstances, I hope in the like manner she would defend my life and honour. I knew not the particulars of the affair in which Arthur Heselrigge fell, till I heard them from your lips. I can easily credit them, for I know his unmanly character. Wallace is a Scot, and acted in Scotland as Gilbert Hambleton would have done in England, were it possible for any vile foreigner to there put his foot upon the neck of a countryman of his. Wherever you have concealed your husband, let it be a distant asylum. At present no track within the jurisdiction of Lanark will be left unsearched by the governor's indefatigable revenge."

Lady Wallace, overcome with gratitude at this generous speech of the English officer, uttered some inarticulate words, expressive more in sound than clearness, of her grateful feelings. Hambleton continued:—"I will use my influence with Heselrigge to prevent the interior of your house being disturbed again; but it being in the course of military operations, I cannot free you from the disagreeable ceremony of a guard being placed to-morrow morning round the domains. This I know will be done to intercept Sir William Wallace should he attempt to return."

"O! that he were indeed far distant!" thought the anxious Marion. The officer then added: "However, you shall be relieved of my detachment directly." And as he spoke, he waved his sword to them who had seized the harper. They advanced still holding their prisoner. He ordered them to commit the man to him, and to sound. The trumpeter obeyed; and in a few seconds the whole detachment was assembled before their commander.

"Soldiers!" cried he, "Sir William Wallace has escaped our hands. Mount your horses, that we may return to Lanark, and search the other side of the town. Lead forth, and I will follow."

The troops obeyed, and falling back through the opened gates, left Sir Gilbert Hambledon alone with Lady Wallace and the wondering Halbert. The brave young man took the now no longer withdrawn hand of the grateful Marion, who had stood trembling while so many of her husband's mortal enemies were assembled under the place of his concealment.

"Noble Englishman," said she, as the last body of soldiers passed from her sight, "I cannot enough thank you for this generous conduct; but, should you or yours be ever in the like extremity with my beloved Wallace (and in these tyrannous times, what brave spirit can answer for its continued safety?) may the ear which has heard you this night, at that hour repay my gratitude!"

"Sweet lady!" answered Hambledon, "I thank you for your prayer. God is indeed the benefactor of a true soldier; and though I serve my king, and obey my commanders, yet it is only to the Lord of battles that I look for a sure reward. And whether He pay me here with victories and honours, or take my soul to receive my laurel in paradise, it is all one to Gilbert Hambledon. But the night is cold: I must see you safe within your own doors: and then, lady, farewell!"

Lady Wallace yielded to the impulse of his hand, and with redoubled haste, as she heard another rustling in the tree above her head. Hambledon did not notice it; but desiring Halbert to follow, in a few minutes disappeared with the agitated Marion into the house.

Wallace listened to the replies of his Marion with exultation; and when the Englishman ordered his men to withdraw, and delivered himself so generously respecting the safety of the man he came to seize, Wallace could hardly prevent a brave confidence in such virtue from compelling him to come

from his concealment, and thank his noble enemy on the spot. But in consideration that such disclosure would put the military duty and the generous nature of the officer at variance, he desisted, with such an agitation of spirits that the boughs had again shaken under him, and reawakened the alarm of his trembling wife.

"Omnipotent virtue!" exclaimed Wallace to himself; "if it were possible that thy generous spirit could animate the breast of an invading conqueror, how soon would the vanquished cease to forget their former freedom, and learn to love their vassalage! This man's nobleness, how soon has it quenched the flame of vengeance with which, when I ascended this tree, I prayed for the extirpation of every follower of the detested Edward!"

"Sir William! my master!" cried a well-known voice, in a suppressed tone, as if still fearful of being overheard. It was Halbert's. "Speak, my dear lord; are you safe?"

"In heart and body!" returned Wallace, sliding from the tree, and leaping on the ground. "One only of the arrows touched me; and that merely striking my bugle, fell back amongst the leaves. I must now hasten to the dearest, the noblest of women!"

Halbert begged him to stay till they should hear the retreat from the English trumpets. "Till their troops are out of sight," added he, "I cannot believe you safe."

"Hark!" cried Wallace, "the horses are now descending the craig. That must satisfy you, honest Halbert." With these words he flew across the grass, and, entering the house, met the returning Marion, who had just bade farewell to Hambleton. She rushed into his arms, and with the excess of a disturbed and uncertain joy, fainted on his neck.

His voice, his caresses, soon restored her to sensibility and recollection. She wept on his breast, and with love's own eloquence, thanked heaven that he had escaped the search and the arrows of his enemies.

"But, my dear lady," interrupted Halbert, "remember my master must not stay here. You know the English commander said he must fly far away. Nay, spies may even now be lurking to betray him."

"You are right," cried she. "My Wallace, you must depart. Should the guard arrive soon, your flight may be prevented. You must go now—but, oh! whither?"

"Not very distant, my love. In going from thee, I leave behind all that makes life precious to me; how then can I go far away? No! there are recesses among the Cartlane craigs, I discovered while hunting, and which I believe have been visited by no mortal foot but my own. There will I be, my Marion, before sunrise; and before it sets, thither must you send Halbert, to tell me how you fare. Three notes from thine own sweet strains of *Thusa ha moasg na reultan mor*, blown by his pipe, shall be a sign to me that he is there; and I will come forth to hear tidings of thee."

"Ah, my Wallace, let me go with thee!"

"What, dearest!" returned he, "to live amidst rocks and streams; to expose thy tender self, and thine unborn infant, to all the accidents of such a lodging!"

"But are not you going to so rough, so dangerous a lodging?" asked she. "O! would not rocks and streams be heaven's paradise to me, when blessed with the presence of my husband? Ah! let me go!"

"Impossible, my lady," cried Halbert, afraid that the melting heart of his master would consent; "you are safe here; and your flight would awaken suspicion in the English, that he had not gone far. Your ease and safety are dearer to him than his own life; and most likely by his cares to preserve them, he would be traced, and so fall a ready sacrifice to the enemy."

"It is true, my Marion; I could not preserve you in the places to which I go."

"But the hardships you will endure!" cried she; "to sleep on the cold stones, with no covering but the sky; or the dripping vault of some dreary cave! I have not courage to abandon you alone to such cruel rigours."

"Cease, my beloved!" interrupted he, "cease these groundless alarms. Neither rocks nor storms have any threats to me. Alike to Wallace is the couch of down or the bed of heather; so, best-beloved of my heart, grieve not at hardships which were once my sport, and will now be my safety."

"Then, farewell! May good angels guard thee!" Her voice failed; she put his hand to her lips.

"Courage, my Marion," said he; "remember that Wallace lives but in thee. Revive, be happy for my sake; and God, who putteth down the oppressor, will restore me to thine arms." She spoke not, but rising from his breast, clasped her

hands together, and looked up with an expression of fervent prayer; then smiling, through a shower of tears, she waved her hand to him to depart, and instantly disappeared into her own chamber.

Wallace gazed at the closed door, with his soul in his eyes. To leave his Marion thus, to quit her who was the best part of his being, who seemed the very spring of the life now throbbing in his heart, was a contention with his fond, fond love, almost too powerful with his resolution. Here indeed his brave spirit gave way; and he would have followed her, and perhaps have determined to await his fate at her side, had not Halbert, reading his mind in his countenance, taken him by the arm, and drawn him towards the portal.

Wallace soon recovered his better reason, and obeying the friendly impulse of his servant, accompanied him through the garden, to the quarter which pointed towards the heights that led to the remotest recesses of the Clyde. In their way they approached the well where Lord Mar lay. He looked down, and seeing him extended at the bottom, without motion, "I fear," said he, "the earl is dead. As soon as I am gone, and you can collect the dispersed servants, send one into the well to bring him forth; and if he be indeed no more, deposit his body in my oratory, till you can receive his widow's commands respecting his remains. The iron box now in the well is of inestimable value; take it to Lady Wallace and tell her she must guard it as she has done my life, but not to look into it at the peril of what is yet dearer to her—my honour."

Halbert promised to adhere to his master's orders; and Wallace, girding on his sword, and taking his hunting-spear, pressed the faithful hand that presented it, and again enjoining him to be watchful of the tranquillity of his lady, and to send him tidings of her in the evening, to the cave near the Corie Lynn, he climbed the wall, and was out of sight in an instant.

CHAPTER III.

ELDERSLIE.

HALBERT returned to the house, and entering the room softly into which Marion had withdrawn, beheld her on her knees before a crucifix: she was praying for the safety of her husband.

"May he, O gracious Lord!" cried she, "soon return to

his home. But if I am to see him here no more, oh, may it please Thee to grant me to meet him within Thy arms in heaven ! ”

“ Hear her, blessed Son of Mary ! ” ejaculated the old man. She looked round, and rising from her knees, demanded of him, in a kind but anxious voice, whether he had left her lord in security.

“ In the way to it, my lady ! ” answered Halbert. He repeated all that Wallace had said at parting, and then tried to prevail on her to go to rest. “ Sleep cannot visit my eyes this night, my faithful creature,” replied she ; “ my spirit will follow Wallace in his mountain flight. Go you to your chamber. After you have had repose, that will be time enough to revisit the remains of the poor earl, and to bring them with the box to the house. I will take a religious charge of both, for the sake of the dear entruster.”

Halbert persuaded his lady to lie down on the bed, that her limbs at least might rest after the fatigue of so harassing a night, and she, little suspecting that he meant to do otherwise than to sleep also, kindly wished him repose, and retired.

Halbert resigned himself to await with patience the rising of the sun, when he hoped some of the scared domestics would return ; if not, he determined to go to the cottars who lived in the depths of the glen, and bring some of them to supply the place of the fugitives, and a few, with stouter hearts, to guard his lady.

Thus musing, he sat on a stone bench in the hall, watching anxiously the appearance of that orb, whose setting beams he hoped would light him back with tidings of Sir William Wallace to comfort the lonely heart of his Marion. All seemed at peace. Nothing was heard but the sighing of the trees as they waved before the western window, which opened towards the Lanark hills. The morning was yet grey, and the fresh air blowing in rather chilly, Halbert rose to close the wooden shutter ; at that moment his eyes were arrested by a party of armed men in quick march down the opposite declivity. In a few minutes more their heavy steps sounded in his ears, and he saw the platform before the house filled with English. Alarmed at the sight, he was retreating across the apartment, towards his lady's room, when the great hall door was burst open by a band of soldiers, who rushed forward and seized him.

"Tell me," cried their leader, a man of low stature, with grey locks, but a fierce countenance, "where is the murderer? Where is Sir William Wallace? Speak, or the torture shall force you."

Halbert shuddered, but it was for his defenceless lady, not for himself. "My master," said he, "is far from this."

"Where?"

"I know not."

"Thou shalt be made to know, thou hoary-headed villain!" cried the same violent interrogator. "Where is the assassin's wife? I will confront ye. Seek her out."

At that word the soldiers parted right and left, and in a moment afterwards three of them appeared, with shouts, bringing in the trembling Marion.

"Alas! my lady!" cried Halbert, struggling to approach her, as with terrified apprehension she looked around; but they held her fast, and he saw her led up to the merciless wretch who had given the orders to have her summoned.

"Woman!" cried he, "I am the governor of Lanark. You now stand before the representative of the great King Edward, and on your allegiance to him, and on the peril of your life, I command you to answer me three questions. Where is Sir William Wallace, the murderer of my nephew? Who is that old Scot, for whom my nephew was slain? He and his whole family shall meet my vengeance! And tell me where is that box of treasure which your husband stole from Douglas Castle. Answer me these questions on your life."

Lady Wallace remained silent.

"Speak, woman!" demanded the governor. "If fear cannot move you, know that I can reward as well as avenge. I will endow you richly, if you declare the truth. If you persist to refuse you die."

"Then I die," replied she, scarcely opening her half-closed eyes, as she leaned, fainting and motionless, against the soldier who held her.

"What!" cried the governor, stifling his rage, in hopes to gain by persuasion on a spirit he found threats could not intimidate; "can so gently a lady reject the favour of England: large grants in this country, and perhaps a fine English knight for a husband, when you might have all for the trifling service of giving up a traitor to his liege lord, and confessing where his robberies lie concealed? Speak, fair dame; give me this

information and the lands of the wounded chieftain whom Wallace brought here, with the hand of the handsome Sir Gilbert Hambleton, shall be your reward. Rich, and a beauty, in Edward's court! Lady, can you now refuse to purchase all, by declaring the hiding-place of the traitor Wallace?"

"It is easier to die!"

"Fool!" cried Heselrigge, driven from his assumed temper by her steady denial. "What! is it easier for these dainty limbs to be hacked to pieces by my soldiers' axes? Is it easier for that fair bosom to be trodden under foot by my horse's hoofs, and for that beauteous head of thine to decorate my lance? Is all this easier than to tell me where to find a murderer and his gold?"

Lady Wallace shuddered: she stretched her hands to heaven.

"Speak once for all!" cried the enraged governor, drawing his sword; "I am no waxen-hearted Hambleton, to be cajoled by your beauty. Declare where Wallace is concealed or dread my vengeance."

The horrid steel gleamed across the eyes of the unhappy Marion; unable to sustain herself she sunk on the ground.

"Kneel not to me for mercy!" cried the fierce wretch: "I grant none, unless you confess your husband's hiding-place."

A momentary strength darted from the heart of Lady Wallace to her voice. "I kneel to heaven alone, and may it ever preserve my Wallace from the fangs of Edward and his tyrants!"

"Blasphemous wretch!" cried the infuriate Heselrigge: and in that moment he plunged his sword into her defenceless breast. Halbert, who had all this time been held back by the soldiers, could not believe that the fierce governor could perpetrate the horrid deed he threatened; but seeing it done, with a giant's strength and a terrible cry he burst from the hands which held him, and had thrown himself on the bleeding Marion before her murderer could strike his second blow. However, it fell, and pierced through the neck of the faithful servant before it reached her heart. She opened her dying eyes, and seeing who it was that would have shielded her life, just articulated, "Halbert! my Wallace—to God—" and with the last unfinished sentence her pure soul took its flight to regions of eternal peace.

The old man's heart almost burst when he felt that before heaving bosom now motionless ; and groaning with grief, and fainting with loss of blood, he lay senseless on her body.

A terrific stillness was now in the hall. Not a man spoke ; all stood looking on each other, with a stern horror marking each pale countenance. Heselrigge, dropping his blood-stained sword on the ground, perceived by the behaviour of his men that he had gone too far, and fearful of arousing the indignation of awakened humanity to some act against himself, he addressed the soldiers in an unusual accent of condescension. "My friends," said he, "we will now return to Lanark ; to-morrow you may come back, for I reward your services of this night with the plunder of Elderslie."

"May a curse light on him who carries a stick from its grounds !" exclaimed a veteran from the further end of the hall. "Amen !" murmured all the soldiers, with one consent ; and falling back, they disappeared, one by one, out of the great door, leaving Heselrigge alone with the old soldier, who stood leaning on his sword, looking on the murdered lady.

"Grimsby, why stand you there ?" demanded Heselrigge ; "follow me."

"Never !" returned the soldier.

"What !" exclaimed the governor, momentarily forgetting his panic, "dare you speak thus to your commander ? March on before me this instant, or expect to be treated as a rebel."

"I march at your command no more," replied the veteran, eyeing him resolutely ; "the moment you perpetrated this bloody deed you became unworthy the name of man ; and I should disgrace my own manhood were I ever again to obey the word of such a monster !"

"Villain !" cried the enraged Heselrigge, "you shall die for this."

"That may be," answered Grimsby, "by the hands of some tyrant like yourself ; but no brave man, not the royal Edward, would do otherwise than acquit his soldier for refusing obedience to the murderer of an innocent woman. It was not so he treated the wives and daughters of the slaughtered Saracens when I followed his banners over the fields of Palestine !"

"Thou canting miscreant !" cried Heselrigge, springing on him suddenly, and aiming his dagger at his breast. But

the soldier arrested the weapon, and at the same instant closing upon the assassin, with a turn of his foot threw him to the ground. Heselrigge, as he lay prostrate, seeing his dagger in his adversary's hand, with the most dastardly promises, implored for life.

"Monster!" cried the soldier, "I would not pollute my honest hands with such unnatural blood. Neither, though thy hand has been lifted against my life, would I willingly take thine. It is not rebellion against my commander that actuates me, but hatred of the vilest of murderers. I go far from you, or your power; but if you forswear your voluntary oath, and attempt to seek me out for vengeance, remember it is a soldier of the cross you pursue, and a dire retribution shall be demanded by heaven, at a moment you cannot avoid, and with a horror commensurate with your crimes."

There was a solemnity and determination in the voice and manner of the soldier that paralysed the soul of the governor; he trembled violently, and repeating his oath of leaving Grimsby unmolested, at last obtained his permission to return to Lanark. The men, in obedience to the conscience-struck orders of their commander, had mounted their horses, and were now far out of sight. Heselrigge's charger was still in the courtyard; he was hurrying towards it, but the soldier, with a prudent suspicion, called out, "Stop, sir! you must walk to Lanark. The cruel are generally false: I cannot trust your word, should you have the power to break it. Leave this horse here—to-morrow you may send for it. I shall then be far away."

Heselrigge saw that remonstrance would be unavailing; and shaking with impotent rage, he turned into the path which, after five weary miles, would lead him once more to his citadel.

From the moment the soldier's manly spirit had dared to deliver its abhorrence of Lady Wallace's murder, he was aware that his life would no longer be safe within reach of the machinations of Heselrigge; and he resolved to take shelter in the mountains till he could have an opportunity of going beyond sea to join his king's troops in the Guienne wars.

Full of these thoughts he returned into the hall. As he approached the bleeding group on the floor, he perceived it move; hoping that perhaps the unhappy lady might not be dead, he drew near; but, alas! as he bent to examine, he touched her hand and found it quite cold. The blood which

had streamed from the now exhausted heart, lay congealed upon her arms and bosom. Grimsby shuddered. Again he saw her move, but it was not with her own life; the recovering senses of her faithful servant, as his arms clung around the body, had disturbed the remains of her who would wake no more.

On seeing that existence yet struggled in one of these blameless victims, Grimsby did his utmost to revive the old man. He raised him from the ground, and poured some strong liquor he had in a flask into his mouth. Halbert breathed freer, and his kind surgeon, with the venerable harper's own plaid, bound up the wound in his neck. Halbert opened his eyes. When he fixed them on the rough features and English helmet of the soldier, he closed them again with a deep groan.

"My honest Scot," said Grimsby, "trust in me. I am a man like yourself; and though a Southron, am no enemy to age and helplessness."

The harper took courage at these words: he again looked at the soldier; but suddenly recollecting what had passed, he turned his eyes towards the body of his mistress, on which the beams of the now rising sun were shining. He started up, and staggering towards her, would have fallen had not Grimsby supported him. "O! my lady! my lovely lady!" cried he, wringing his hands. "See how low she lies who was once the delight of all eyes, the comforter of all hearts." The old man's sobs suffocated him. The veteran turned away his face; tears dropped upon his hand. "Accursed Heselrigge," ejaculated he, "thy fate must come!"

"If there be a man's heart in all Scotland, it is not far distant!" cried Halbert. "My master lives, and will avenge his murder. You weep, soldier; and you will not betray what has now escaped me."

"I have fought in Palestine," returned he, "and a soldier of the cross betrays none who trust him. Let me assist you to put this poor lady's remains into some decent place; and then, my honest Scot, we must separate."

Halbert, at these words, threw himself upon the bosom of his mistress, and wept with loud lamentations over her.

"There sleeps the pride and hope of Elderslie, the mother with her child! O! my master, my widowed master," cried he, "what will comfort thee!"

Fearing the ill consequences of further delay, the soldier again

interrupted his lamentations with arguments for flight ; and Halbert recollecting the oratory in which Wallace had ordered the body of Lord Mar to be deposited, named it for that of his dead lady. Grimsby, immediately wrapping the beauteous corpse in the white garments which hung about it, raised it in his arms, and was conducted by Halbert to a little chapel in the heart of a neighbouring cliff.

The still weeping old man removed the altar ; and Grimsby, laying the shrouded Marion upon its rocky platform, covered her with the pall, which he drew from the holy table, and laid the crucifix upon her bosom. Halbert, when his beloved mistress was thus hidden from his sight, threw himself on his knees beside her, and in the vehement language of grief, offered up a prayer for her departed soul.

“Hear me, righteous Judge of heaven and earth !” cried he ; “as Thou didst avenge the blood of innocence shed in Bethlehem, so let the grey hairs of Heselrigge be brought down in blood to the grave for the murder of this innocent lady !” Halbert kissed the cross, and rising from his knees, went weeping out of the chapel, followed by the soldier.

Having closed the door, and carefully locked it, absorbed in meditation on what would be the agonised transports of his master when he should tell him these grievous tidings, Halbert proceeded in silence till he and his companion in passing the well were startled by a groan.

“Here is some one in extremity !” cried the soldier. “Is it possible he lives !” exclaimed Halbert, bending down to the edge of the well with the same inquiry. “Yes,” feebly answered the earl, “I still exist, but am very faint. If all be safe above, I pray remove me into the upward air !” Halbert replied that it was indeed necessary he should ascend immediately : and lowering the rope, told him to tie the iron box to it and then himself. This done, with some difficulty, and the assistance of the wondering soldier (who now expected to see the husband of the unfortunate Lady Wallace emerge to the knowledge of his loss), he at last effected the earl’s release. For a few seconds the fainting nobleman supported himself on his countryman’s shoulder while the fresh morning breeze gradually revived his exhausted frame. The soldier looked at his grey locks and furrowed brow, and marvelled how such proofs of age could belong to the man whose resistless valour had discomfited the fierce determination of Arthur

Heselrigge and his myrmidons. However, his doubts of the veteran before him being other than the brave Wallace were soon satisfied by the earl himself, who asked for a draught of the water which trickled down the opposite hill ; and while Halbert went to bring it, Lord Mar raised his eyes to inquire for Sir William and the Lady Marion. He started when he saw English armour on the man he would have accosted, and rising suddenly from the stone on which he sat, demanded, in a stern voice, "Who art thou?"

"An Englishman," answered the soldier; "one who does not, like the monster Heselrigge, disgrace the name. I would assist you, noble Wallace, to fly this spot. After that I shall seek refuge abroad; and there, on the fields of Guienne, demonstrate my fidelity to my king."

Mar looked at him steadily. "You mistake; I am not Sir William Wallace."

At that moment Halbert came up with the water. The earl drank it, and turning to the venerable bearer, he asked of him whether his master were safe.

"I trust he is," replied the old man; "but you, my lord, must hasten hence. A foul murder has been committed here since he left it."

"But where is Lady Wallace?" asked the earl; "if there be such danger we must not leave her to meet it."

"She will never meet danger more!" cried the old man, clasping his hands; "she is in the bosom of the Virgin; and no second assassin's steel can reach her there."

"What!" exclaimed the earl, hardly articulate with horror; "is Lady Wallace murdered?" Halbert answered only with tears.

"Yes," said the soldier; "and detestation of so unmanly an outrage provoked me to desert his standard. But no time must now be lost in unavailing lamentation. Heselrigge will return; and if we also would not be sacrificed to his rage, we must hence immediately."

The earl, struck dumb at this recital, gave the soldier time to recount the particulars. When he had finished, Lord Mar saw the necessity for instant flight, and ordered horses to be brought from the stables. Though he had fainted in the well the present shock gave such tension to his nerves, that he found, in spite of his wound, he could now ride without difficulty.

Halbert went as commanded, and returned with two horses.

Having only amongst rocks and glens to go, he did not bring one for himself ; and begging the good soldier might attend the earl to Bothwell, he added, " He will guard you and this box, which Sir William Wallace holds as his life. What it contains I know not ; and none, he says, may dare search into. But you will take care of it for his sake till more peaceful times allow him to reclaim his own ! "

" Fatal box ! " cried the soldier, regarding it with an abhorrent eye, " that was the leading cause which brought Heselrigge to Elderslie. "

" How ? " inquired the earl. Grimsby then briefly related that immediately after the return to Lanark of the detachment sent to Elderslie, under the command of Sir Gilbert Hambledon, an officer arrived from the English garrison in Douglas, and told the governor that Sir William Wallace had that evening taken a quantity of treasure from the castle. His report was, that the English soldiers who stood near the Scottish knight when he mounted at the castle gate saw a long iron coffer under his arm, but not suspecting its having belonged to Douglas, they thought not of it, till they overheard Sir John Monteith, as he passed through one of the galleries, muttering something about gold and a box. To intercept the robber amongst his native glens the soldiers deemed impracticable, and therefore their captain came immediately to lay the information before the governor of Lanark. As the scabbard found in the affray with young Arthur had betrayed the victor to have been Sir William Wallace, this intimation of his having been also the instrument of wresting from the grasp of Heselrigge perhaps the most valuable spoil in Douglas, exasperated him to the most vindictive excess. Inflamed with the double furies of revenge and avarice, he ordered out a new troop, and placing himself at its head, took the way to Elderslie. One of the servants, whom some of Hambledon's men had seized for the sake of information, on being threatened with the torture, confessed to Heselrigge that not only Sir William Wallace was in the house when it was attacked, but that the person whom he had rescued in the streets of Lanark, and who proved to be a wealthy nobleman, was there also. This whetted the eagerness of the governor to reach Elderslie ; and expecting to get a rich booty, without the most distant idea of the horrors he was going to perpetrate, a large detachment of men followed him.

"To extort money from you, my lord," continued the soldier, "and to obtain that fatal coffer, were his main objects; but disappointed in his darling passion of avarice, he forgot he was a man, and the blood of innocence glutted his barbarous vengeance."

"Hateful gold!" cried Lord Mar, spurning the box with his foot; "it cannot be for itself the noble Wallace so greatly prizes it; it must be a trust."

"I believe it is," returned Halbert, "for he enjoined my lady to preserve it for the sake of his honour. Take care of it then, my lord, for the same sacred reason."

The Englishman made no objection to accompany the earl; and by a suggestion of his own, Halbert brought him a Scottish bonnet and cloak from the house. While he put them on, the earl observed that the harper held a drawn and blood-stained sword in his hand, on which he steadfastly gazed.

"Whence came that horrid weapon?" cried Lord Mar.

"It is my lady's blood," replied Halbert, still looking on it. "I found it where she lay, in the hall, and I will carry it to my master. Was not every drop of her blood dear to him? and here are many." As the old man spoke he bent his head on the sword, and groaned heavily.

"England shall hear more of this!" cried Mar, as he threw himself across the horse. "Give me that fatal box; I will buckle it to my saddle-bow. Inadequate will be my utmost care of it, to repay the vast sorrows its preservation and mine have brought upon the head of my deliverer."

The Englishman in silence mounted his horse, and Halbert opened a back gate that led to the hills which lay between Elderslie and Bothwell Castle. Lord Mar took a golden-trophied bugle from his breast: "Give this to your master, and tell him that by whatever hands he sends it, the sight of it shall always command the services of Donald Mar. I go to Bothwell, in expectation that he will join me there. In making it his home he will render me happy, for my friendship is now bound to him by bonds which only death can sever."

Halbert took the horn, and promising faithfully to repeat the earl's message, prayed God to bless him and the honest soldier. A rocky promontory soon excluded them from his sight, and in a few minutes more even the sound of their horses' hoofs was lost on the soft herbage of the winding dell.

"Now I am alone in this once happy spot. Not a voice,

not a sound. Oh! Wallace!" cried he, throwing up his venerable arms, "thy house is left unto thee desolate, and I am to be the fatal messenger." With the last words he struck into a deep ravine which led to the remotest solitudes of the glen, and pursued his way in dreadful silence. Halbert looked to the right and to the left. All was lonely and comfortless; and sighing bitterly over the wide devastation, he concealed the fatal sword and the horn under his cloak, and with a staff which he broke from a withered tree, took his way down the winding craigs. Many a pointed flint pierced his aged feet while exploring the almost trackless paths, which by their direction he hoped would lead him at length to the deep caves of Corie Lynn.

CHAPTER IV.

CORIE LYNN.

AFTER having traversed many a weary rood, the venerable minstrel of the house of Wallace, exhausted by fatigue, sat down on the declivity of a steep craig. The burning beams of the mid-day sun now beat upon the rocks, but the overshadowing foliage afforded him shelter, and a few berries with a draught of water from a friendly burn, offered themselves to revive his enfeebled limbs. Insufficient as they appeared, he took them, blessing heaven for sending even these, and strengthened by half an hour's rest, again he grasped his staff to pursue his way.

After breaking a passage through the entangled shrubs that grew across the only possible footing in this solitary wilderness, he went along the side of the expanding stream, which at every turning of the rocks increased in depth and violence. The rills from above, and other mountain brooks, pouring from abrupt falls down the craigs, covered him with spray, and intercepted his passage. Finding it impracticable to proceed through the rushing torrent of a cataract, he turned from its tumbling waters and crept on his hands and knees up the opposite declivity, catching by the fern and other weeds to stay him from falling back into the flood below. Prodigious craggy heights towered above his head as he ascended; while the rolling clouds which canopied their summits, seemed descending to wrap him in their "fleecy skirts"; or the

projecting rocks bending over the waters of the glen, left him only a narrow shelf in the cliff, along which he crept till it brought him to the mouth of a cavern.

He must either enter it or return the way he came, or attempt the descent of overhanging precipices, which nothing could surmount but the pinions of their native birds. Above him was the mountain. Retread his footsteps until he had seen his beloved master he was resolved not to do—to perish in these glens would be more tolerable to him; for while he moved forward, hope, even in the arms of death, would cheer him with the whisper *that he was in the path of duty*. He therefore entered the cavity, and passing on, soon perceived an aperture, through which, emerging on the other side, he found himself again on the margin of the river. Having attained a wider bed, it left him a still narrower causeway to perform the remainder of his journey.

But an unlooked-for obstacle baffled his progress. A growing gloom he had not observed in the sky-excluded valley having entirely overspread the heavens, at this moment suddenly discharged itself, amidst peals of thunder, in heavy floods of rain upon his head.

Fearful of being overwhelmed by the streams, which now on all sides crossed his path, he kept upon the edge of the river, to be as far as possible from the influence of their violence. And thus he proceeded, slowly and with trepidation, through numerous defiles and under the plunge of many a mountain-torrent, till the augmented storm of a world of waters, dashing from side to side, and boiling up with the noise and fury of the contending elements above, told him he was indeed not far from the fall of Corie Lynn.

The spray was spread in so thick a mist over the glen he knew not how to advance. He paused and looked around. The rain had ceased, but the thunder still rolled at a distance, and echoed tremendously from the surrounding rocks. Halbert shook his grey locks, streaming with wet, and looked towards the sun, now gilding with its last rays the vast sheets of falling water.

“This is thine hour, my master!” exclaimed the old man: “and surely I am too near the Lynn to be far from thee!”

With these words he raised the pipe that hung at his breast, and blew three strains of the appointed air. In former days it used to call from her bower that “fair star of evening,” the

beauteous Marion, now departed for ever into her native heaven. The notes trembled as his agitated breath breathed them into the instrument ; but feeble as they were, and though the roar of the cataract might have prevented their reaching a less attentive ear than that of Wallace, yet he sprang from the innermost recess under the fall, and dashing through its rushing waters, the next instant was at the side of Halbert.

“ Faithful creature ! ” cried he, catching him in his arms, with all the joy of that moment which ends the anxious wish to learn tidings of what is dearest in the world, “ How fares my Marion ? ”

“ I am weary,” cried the heart-stricken old man ; “ take me within your sanctuary, and I will tell you all.”

Wallace perceived that his time-worn servant was indeed exhausted ; and knowing the toils and hazards of the perilous track he must have passed over in his way to this fearful solitude ; also remembering how, as he sat in his shelter, he had himself dreaded the effects of the storm upon so aged a traveller, he no longer wondered at the dispirited tone of his greeting, and readily accounted for the pale countenance and tremulous step which at first had excited his alarm.

Giving the old man his hand, he led him with caution to the brink of the Lynn ; and then folding him in his arms, dashed with him through the tumbling water into the cavern he had chosen for his asylum. Halbert sunk against its rocky side, and putting forth his hand to catch some of the water as it fell, drew a few drops to his parched lips, and swallowed them. After this light refreshment, he breathed a little and turned his eyes upon his anxious master.

“ Are you sufficiently recovered, Halbert, to tell me how you left my dearest Marion ? ”

Halbert dreaded to see the animated light which now cheered him from the eyes of his master, overclouded with the Cimmerian horrors his story must unfold : he evaded a direct reply : “ I saw your guest in safety : I saw him and the iron box on their way to Bothwell.”

“ What ! ” inquired Wallace, “ were we mistaken ? was not the earl dead when we looked into the well ? ” Halbert replied in the negative, and was proceeding with a circumstantial account of his recovery, and his departure, when Wallace interrupted him.

“ But what of my wife, Halbert ? why tell me of others

before of her ? She whose safety and remembrance are now my sole comfort."

"Oh, my dear lord !" cried Halbert, throwing himself on his knees in a paroxysm of mental agony, "she remembers you where best her prayers can be heard. She kneels for her beloved Wallace before the throne of God !"

"Halbert !" cried Sir William, in a low and fearful voice, "what would you say ? My Marion—speak ! tell me in one word, she lives !"

"In heaven !"

Wallace covered his face with his hands and fell with a deep groan against the side of the cavern. The horrid idea of premature maternal pains, occasioned by anguish for him ; of her consequent death, involving perhaps that of her infant, struck him to the soul : a mist seemed passing over his eyes : life was receding ; and gladly did he believe he felt his spirit on the eve of joining hers.

In having declared that the idol of his master's heart no longer existed for him in this world, Halbert thought he had revealed the worst, and he went on. "Her latest breath was spent in prayer for you. 'My Wallace' were the last words her angel spirit uttered as it issued from her bleeding wounds."

The cry that burst from the heart of Wallace, as he started on his feet at this horrible disclosure, seemed to pierce through all the recesses of the glen ; and with an instantaneous and dismal return was re-echoed from rock to rock. Halbert threw his arms round his master's knees. The frantic blaze of his eyes struck him with affright. "Hear me, my lord ; for the sake of your wife, now an angel hovering near you, hear what I have to say."

Wallace looked around with a wild countenance. "My Marion near me ! Blessed spirit ! Oh, my murdered wife ! my unborn babe ! Who made these wounds ?" cried he, catching Halbert's arm with a tremendous though unconscious grasp ; "tell me who had the heart to aim a blow at that angel's life ?"

"The governor of Lanark," replied Halbert.

"How ? for what ?" demanded Wallace, with the terrific glare of madness shooting from his eyes. "My wife ! my wife ! what had she done ?"

"He came at the head of a band of ruffians, and seizing my lady, commanded her on the peril of her life, to declare

where you and the Earl of Mar and the box of treasure were concealed. My lady persisted to refuse him information, and in a deadly rage he plunged his sword into her breast."

Wallace clenched his hands over his face, and Halbert went on. "Before he aimed a second blow I had broken from the men who held me, and thrown myself on her bosom; but all could not save her: the villain's sword had penetrated her heart!"

"Great God!" exclaimed Wallace, "dost Thou hear this murder?" His hands were stretched towards heaven; then falling on his knees, "Give me power, Almighty Judge!" cried he, "to assert Thy justice! Let me avenge this angel's blood, and then take me to Thy mercy!"

"My gracious master," cried Halbert, seeing him rise with a stern composure; "here is the fatal sword: the blood on it is sacred, and I brought it to you."

Wallace took it in his hand. He gazed at it, touched it, and kissed it frantically. The blade was hardly yet dry, and the ensanguined hue came off upon the pressure. "Marion! Marion!" cried he, "is it thine? Does thy blood stain my lip?" He paused for a moment, leaning his burning forehead against the fatal blade; then looking up with a terrific smile, "Beloved of my soul! never shall this sword leave my hand till it has drunk the life-blood of thy murderer."

"What is it you intend, my lord?" cried Halbert, viewing with increased alarm the resolute ferocity which now, blazing from every part of his countenance, seemed to dilate his figure with more than mortal daring. "What can you do? Your single arm——"

"I am not single—God is with me. I am His avenger. Now tremble, tyranny! I come to hurl thee down!" At the word he sprang from the cavern's mouth, and had already reached the topmost cliff when the piteous cries of Halbert penetrated his ear; they recalled him to recollection, and returning to his faithful servant, he tried to soothe his fears, and spoke in a composed though determined tone. "I will lead you from this solitude to the mountains, where the shepherds of Elderslie are tending their flocks. With them you will find a refuge till you have strength to reach Bothwell Castle. Lord Mar will protect you for my sake."

Halbert now remembered the bugle, and putting it into his master's hand, with its accompanying message, asked for some testimony in return, that the earl might know he had

delivered it safely. "Even a lock of your precious hair, my beloved master, will be sufficient."

"Thou shalt have it, severed from my head by this accursed steel," answered Wallace, taking off his bonnet, and letting his amber locks fall in tresses on his shoulders. Halbert burst into a fresh flood of tears, for he remembered how often it had been the delight of Marion to comb these bright tresses and to twist them round her ivory fingers.

"Marion, thy blood hath marked it!" exclaimed he; "and every hair on my head shall be dyed of the same hue before this sword is sheathed upon thy murderers. Here, Halbert," continued he, knotting it together, "take this to the Earl of Mar: it is all, most likely, he will ever see again of William Wallace. Should I fall, tell him to look on that, and in my wrongs read the future miseries of Scotland, and remember that God armeth the patriot's hand. Let him act on that conviction, and Scotland may yet be free."

Halbert placed the lock in his bosom, but again repeated his entreaties, that his master would accompany him to Bothwell Castle. He urged the consolation he would meet from the good earl's friendship.

"If he indeed regard me," returned Wallace, "for my sake let him cherish you. My consolation must come from a higher hand: I go where it directs. If I live you shall see me again; but twilight approaches—we must away. The sun must not rise again upon Heselrigge."

Halbert now followed the rapid steps of Wallace, who, assisting the feeble limbs of his faithful servant, drew him up the precipitous side of the Lynn* and then leaping from rock to rock, awaited with impatience the lower advances of the poor old harper, as he crept round a circuit of overhanging cliffs, to join him on the summit of the craigs.

Together they struck into the most inaccessible defiles of the mountains, and proceeded till, on discerning smoke whitening with its ascending curls the black sides of the impending rocks, Wallace saw himself near the objects of his search. He sprang on a high cliff projecting over this mountain valley, and blowing his bugle with a few notes of the well-known *pibroch* of Lanarkshire, was answered by the reverberation of a thousand echoes.

* The cavern which sheltered Sir William Wallace, near Corie Lynn, is yet revered by the people.

At the loved sounds which had not dared to visit their ears since the Scottish standard was lowered to Edward, the hills seemed teeming with life. Men rushed from their fastnesses and women with their babies eagerly followed, to see whence sprung a summons so dear to every Scottish heart. Wallace stood on the cliff, like the newly-aroused genius of his country : his long plaid floated afar, and his glittering hair, streaming on the blast, seemed to mingle with the golden fires which shot from the heavens. Wallace raised his eyes—a clash as of the tumult of contending armies filled the sky, and flames and flashing steel, and the horrid red of battle, streamed from the clouds upon the hills.

“ Scotsmen ! ” cried Wallace, waving the fatal sword, which blazed in the glare of these northern lights, like a flaming brand, “ behold how the heavens cry aloud to you ! I come in the midst of their fires, to call you to vengeance. I come in the name of all ye hold dear, of the wives of your bosoms, and the children in their arms, to tell you the poniard of England is unsheathed—innocence, age, and infancy fall before it. With this sword, last night, did Heselrigge, the English tyrant of Lanark, break into my house, and murder my wife.”

The shriek of horror that burst from every mouth interrupted Wallace. “ Vengeance ! vengeance ! ” was the cry of the men, while tumultuous lamentations for the “ sweet Lady of Elderslie ” filled the air from the women.

Wallace sprang from the cliff into the midst of his brave countrymen. “ Follow me, then, to strike the mortal blow.”

“ Lead on ! ” cried a vigorous old man. “ I drew this stout claymore last in the battle of Largs.* ‘ Life and Alexander ! ’ was then the word of victory ; now, ye accursed Southrons, ye shall meet the slogan † of ‘ Death and Lady Marion.’ ”

“ Death and Lady Marion ! ” was echoed with shouts from mouth to mouth. Every sword was drawn ; and those hardy peasants who owned none, seizing the instruments of pasturage, armed themselves with wolf-spears, pickaxes, forks, and scythes.

Sixty resolute men now arranged themselves around their chief. Wallace, whose widowed heart turned icy cold at the

* Sir Malcolm, the father of Wallace, fell at the battle of Largs, fighting against the Danes.

† Slogan, so the war-cry was termed.

dreadful slogan of his Marion's name, more fiercely grasped his sword, and murmured to himself, "From this hour may Scotland date her liberty, or Wallace return no more! My faithful friends," cried he, turning to his men, and placing his plumed bonnet on his head, "let the spirits of your fathers inspire your souls; ye go to assert that freedom for which they died. Before the moon sets the tyrant of Lanark must fall in blood."

"Death and Lady Marion!" was the pealing answer that echoed from the hills.

Wallace again sprang on the cliffs. His brave peasants followed him; and taking their rapid march by a near cut through a hitherto unexplored defile of the Cartlane Craigs, leaping chasms, and climbing perpendicular rocks, they suffered no obstacles to impede their steps while thus rushing onward like lions to their prey.

CHAPTER V.

LANARK CASTLE.

THE women and the men whom age withheld from so desperate an enterprise, now thronged around Halbert to ask a circumstantial account of the disaster which had filled all with so much horror.

Many tears followed his recital, not one of his auditors was an indifferent listener; all had individually, or in persons dear to them, partaken of the tender Marion's benevolence. Their sick beds had been comforted by her charity; her voice had often administered consolation to their sorrows; her hand had smoothed their pillows, and placed the crucifix before their dying eyes. Some had recovered to bless her, and some departed to record her virtues in heaven.

"Ah! is she gone?" cried a young woman, raising her face, covered with tears, from the bosom of her infant; "is the loveliest lady that ever the sun shone upon cold in the grave? Alas, for me! she it was who, when the Southron soldiers slew my father, and drove us from our home in Ayrshire, gave to my old mother, and my then wounded husband, our cottage by the burnside. Ah! well can I spare him now to avenge her murder."

The night being far advanced, Halbert retired at the invitation of this young woman, to repose on the heather-bed of

her husband, who was now absent with Wallace. The rest of the peasantry withdrew to their coverts, while she and some other women, whose anxieties would not allow them to sleep, sat at the cavern's mouth watching the slowly moving hours.

The objects of their fond and fervent prayers, Wallace and his little army, were rapidly pursuing their march. It was midnight—all was silent as they hurried through the glen, as they ascended with flying footsteps the steep acclivities that led to the cliffs which overhung the vale of Elderslie. Wallace must pass along their brow. Beneath was the tomb of his sacrificed Marion! He rushed forward to snatch one look even of the roof which shrouded her beloved remains.

But in the moment before he mounted the intervening height, a soldier in English armour crossed the path, and was seized by his men. One of them would have cut him down, but Wallace turned away the weapon. "Hold, Scot," cried he, "you are not a Southron to strike the defenceless. This man has no sword."

The reflection on their enemy, which this plea of mercy contained, reconciled the impetuous Scots to the clemency of their leader. The rescued man joyfully recognising the voice of Wallace, exclaimed, "It is my lord! It is Sir William Wallace that has saved my life a second time!"

"Who are you?" asked Wallace; "that helmet can cover no friend of mine."

"I am your servant Dugald," returned the man; "he whom your brave arm saved from the battle-axe of Arthur Heselrigge."

"I cannot now ask you how you came by that armour; but if you be yet a Scot, throw it off and follow me."

"Not to Elderslie, my lord," cried he; "it has been plundered and burnt to the ground by the governor of Lanark."

"Then," exclaimed Wallace, striking his breast, "are the remains of my beloved Marion for ever ravished from my eyes? Insatiate monster!"

"He is Scotland's curse," cried the veteran of Largs. "Forward, my lord, in mercy to your country's groans!"

Wallace had now mounted the craig which overlooked Elderslie. His once happy home had disappeared, and all beneath lay a heap of smoking ashes. He hastened from the sight, and directing the point of his sword with a forceful action towards Lanark, re-echoed with supernatural strength "Forward!"

With the rapidity of lightning his little host flew over the hills, reached the cliffs which divided them from the town, and leaped down before the outward trench of the castle of Lanark. In a moment Wallace sprang so feeble a barrier ; and with a shout of death, in which the tremendous slogan of his men now joined, he rushed upon the guard that held the northern gate.

Here slept the governor. These opponents being slain by the first sweep of the Scottish swords, Wallace hastened onward, winged with two-fold retribution. The noise of battle was behind him ; for the shouts of his men had aroused the garrison and drawn its soldiers, half naked, to the spot. He reached the door of the governor. The sentinel who stood there flew before the terrible warrior that presented himself. All the mighty vengeance of Wallace blazed in his face and seemed to surround his figure with a terrible splendour. With one stroke of his foot he drove the door from its hinges, and rushed into the room.

What a sight for the now awakened and guilty Heselrigge ! It was the husband of the defenceless woman he had murdered, come in the power of justice, with uplifted arm and vengeance in his eyes ! With a terrific scream of despair, and an outcry for the mercy he dared not expect, he fell back into the bed and sought an unavailing shield beneath its folds.

"Marion ! Marion !" cried Wallace, as he threw himself towards the bed and buried the sword, yet red with her blood, through the coverlid, deep into the heart of her murderer. A fiend-like yell from the slain Heselrigge told him his work was done ; and drawing out the sword he took the streaming blade in his hand. "Vengeance is satisfied," cried he : "thus, O God, do I henceforth divide myself from my heart !" As he spoke he snapped the sword in twain, and throwing away the pieces, put back with his hand the impending weapons of his brave companions, who, having cleared the passage of their assailants, had hurried forward to assist in ridding their country of so detestable a tyrant.

"'Tis done," cried he. As he spoke he drew down the coverlid and discovered the body of the governor weltering in blood. The ghastly countenance, on which the agonies of hell seemed imprinted, glared horribly even in death.

Wallace turned away ; but the men exulting in the sight, with a shout of triumph exclaimed, "So fall the enemies of Sir William Wallace !"

"Rather so fall the enemies of Scotland!" cried he; "from this hour Wallace has neither love nor resentment but for her. Heaven has heard me devote myself to work our country's freedom or to die. Who will follow me in so just a cause?"

"All!—with Wallace for ever!"

The new clamour which this resolution excited, intimidated a fresh band of soldiers who were hastening across the courtyard to seek the enemy in the governor's apartments. But on the noise they hastily retreated, and no exertions of their officers could prevail on them to advance again, or even to appear in sight, when the resolute Scots with Wallace at their head soon afterwards issued from the great gate. The English commanders seeing the panic of their men, fell back into the shadow of the towers, where, like men paralysed, they viewed the departure of their enemies over the trenches.

CHAPTER VI.

CARTLANE CRAIGS.

THE sun was rising when the victorious group re-entered the mountain-glen where their families lay. The cheerful sounds of their bugles aroused the sleepers from their caves; and many were the gratulations and embraces which welcomed the warriors to affection and repose.

Wallace, while he threw himself along a bed of purple heath, gathered for him by many a busy female hand, listened with a calmed mind to the fond inquiries of Halbert, who, awakened by the first blast of the horns, had started from his shelter and hastened to hail the safe return of his master. While his faithful followers retired each to the bosom of his rejoicing family, the fugitive chief of Elderslie remained alone with the old man, and recounted to him the success of his enterprise, and the double injuries he had avenged. "The assassin," continued he, "has paid with his life for his inextinguishable crime. He is slain, and with him several of Edward's garrison. My vengeance may be appeased; but what, O Halbert, can bring redress to my widowed heart? All is lost to me; I have now nothing to do with this world, but as I may be the instrument of good to others! The Scottish sword has now been redrawn against our foes, and, with the blessing of heaven, I swear it shall not be sheathed till Scot-

land be rid of the tyranny which has slain my happiness ! Go to Lord Mar, and tell him what are my resolves. I have nothing now that binds me to life but my country ; and henceforth she shall be to me as mistress, wife, and child. Would you deprive me of this tie, Halbert ? Would you, by persuading me to resign my interest in her, devote me to a hermit's seclusion amongst these rocks ? For I will never again appear in the tracks of men if it be not as the defender of her rights."

"But where, my master, shall we find you, should the earl choose to join you with his followers ?"

"In this wilderness, whence I shall not remove rashly. My purpose is to save my countrymen, not to sacrifice them in needless dangers."

Halbert bowed his head in submission, and, leaving Wallace to his rest, retired to the mouth of the cavern to weep alone.

It was noon before the chief awaked from the death-like sleep into which kind nature had plunged his long-harassed senses. He opened his eyes languidly, and when the sight of his rocky apartment forced on him the recollection of all his miseries, he uttered a deep groan. That sad sound, so different from the jocund voice with which Wallace used to issue from his rest, struck on the heart of Halbert : he drew near his master to receive his last commands for Bothwell. "On my knees," added he, "will I implore the earl to send you succours."

"He needs not prayers for that," returned Wallace ; "but depart, dear, worthy Halbert, it will comfort me to know you are in safety, and whithersoever you go, you carry my thanks and blessings with you."

Old age opens the fountains of tears ; Halbert's flowed profusely and bathed his master's hand. Could Wallace have wept, it would have been then ; but that gentle emollient of grief was denied to him, and, with a voice of assumed cheerfulness, he renewed his efforts to encourage his desponding servant. Half persuaded that a Superior Being did indeed call his beloved master to some extraordinary exertions for Scotland, Halbert bade him an anxious farewell, and then withdrew, to commit him to the fidelity of the companions of his destiny. A few of them led the old man on his way, as far as the western declivity of the hills, and then, bidding him good speed, he took the remainder of his journey alone.

After traversing many a weary mile, between Cartlane Craigs and Bothwell Castle, he reached the valley in which that

fortress stands, and calling to the warder at its gates that he came from Sir William Wallace, was immediately admitted, and conducted into the castle.

Halbert was led by a servant into a spacious chamber, where the earl lay upon a couch. A lady, richly habited, and in the bloom of life, sat at his head. Another, much younger, and of resplendent beauty, knelt at his feet, with a salver of medicinal cordials in her hand. The Lady Marion's loveliness had been that of a soft moonlight evening; but the face which now turned upon Halbert as he entered, was "full of light, and splendour, and joy"; and the old man's eyes, even though dimmed in tears, were dazzled. A young man stood near her. On the entrance of Halbert, whom the earl instantly recognised, he raised himself on his arm and welcomed him. The young lady rose, and the young man stepped eagerly forward.

The earl inquired anxiously for Sir William Wallace, and asked if he might expect him soon at Bothwell.

"He cannot yet come, my lord," replied Halbert: "hard is the task he has laid upon his valiant head; but he is avenged! He has slain the governor of Lanark." A faint exclamation broke from the lips of the young lady.

"How?" demanded the earl.

Halbert proceeded:

"When my dear master and his valiant troop were pursuing their way to Lanark, he was met by Dugald, the wounded man who had rushed into the room to apprise us of the advance of the English forces. During the confusion of that horrible night, and in the midst of the contention he crept away, and concealed himself from the soldiers among the bushes of the glen. When all was over he came from his hiding-place; and finding the English soldier's helmet and cloak, poor Dugald disguised himself in those Southron clothes. Exhausted with hunger, he was venturing towards the house in search of food, when the sight of armed men in the hall made him hastily retreat into his former place of refuge. His alarm was soon increased by a redoubled noise from the house; oaths and horrid bursts of merriment seemed to have turned that once abode of honour and of loveliness into the clamorous haunts of ribaldry and rapine. In the midst of the uproar he was surprised by seeing flames issue from the windows. Soldiers poured from the doors with shouts of triumph; some carried off the booty, and others watched by the fire till the

interior of the building was consumed and the rest sunk a heap of smoking ruins,

"The work completed, those horrid ministers of devastation left the vale to its own solitude. Dugald, after waiting a long time to ascertain they were quite gone, crawled from the bushes, and he was speeding to the mountains, when, encountering our armed shepherd, they mistook him for an English soldier, and seized him. The chief of ruined Elderslie recognised his servant; and, with redoubled indignation, his followers heard the history of the mouldering ashes before them."

"Brave, persecuted Wallace!" exclaimed the earl; "how dearly was my life purchased! But proceed, Halbert; tell me that he returned safe from Lanark."

Halbert now recounted the dreadful scenes which took place in that town; and that when the governor fell, Wallace made a vow never to mingle with the world again till Scotland should be free.

"Alas!" cried the earl, "what miracle is to effect that? Surely he will not bury those noble qualities, that prime of manhood, within the gloom of a cloister!"

"No, my lord: he has retired to the fastnesses of Cartlane Craigs."

"Why," resumed Mar, "why did he not rather fly to me? This castle is strong; and while one stone of it remains upon another, not all the hosts of England should take him hence."

"It was not your friendship he doubted," returned the old man; "love for his country compels him to reject all comfort in which she does not share. His last words to me were these: 'I have nothing now to do but to assert the liberties of Scotland, and to rid her of her enemies. Go to Lord Mar; take this lock of my hair, stained with the blood of my wife. It is all, most likely, he will ever again see of William Wallace. Should I fall, tell him to look on that, and in my wrongs read the future miseries of Scotland; and remember that God armeth the patriot!'"

Tears dropped so fast from the young lady's eyes, she was obliged to walk to a window to restrain a more violent burst of grief.

"O! my uncle," cried the youth, "surely the freedom of Scotland is possible. I feel in my soul that the words of the brave Wallace are prophetic."

The earl held the lock of hair in his hands ; he regarded it, lost in meditation.

“ ‘God armeth the patriot !’ ” He paused again, his before pallid cheek taking a thousand animated hues ; then raising the sacred present to his lips, “ Yes,” cried he, “ thy vow shall be performed ; and while Donald Mar has an arm to wield a sword, or a man to follow to the field, thou shalt command both him and them ! ”

“ But not as you are, my lord,” cried the elder lady, “ your wounds are yet unhealed ; your fever is still raging ! Would it not be madness to expose your safety at such a crisis ? ”

“ I shall not take arms myself,” answered he, “ till I can bear them with effect ; meanwhile all that I can raise to guard the life of my deliverer and to promote the cause, must be summoned. This lock shall be my pennon ; and what Scotsman will look on that and shrink from his colours ! Here, Helen, my child,” cried he, addressing the young lady, “ before to-morrow’s dawn, have this hair wrought into my banner. It will be a patriot’s standard ; and let his own irresistible words be the motto—*God armeth me.*”

Helen advanced with awestruck trepidation. Having been told by the earl of the generous valour of Wallace, and of the cruel death of his lady, she had conceived a gratitude and a pity deeper than language could express for the man who had lost so much by succouring one so dear to her. She took the lock, and, trembling with emotion, was leaving the room, when she heard her cousin throw himself on his knees.

“ I beseech you, my honoured uncle,” cried he, “ if you have love for me, or value for my future fame, allow me to be the bearer of yon banner to Sir William Wallace.”

Helen stopped at the threshold to hear the reply.

“ You could not, my dear nephew,” returned the earl, “ have asked me any favour I could grant with so much joy. To-morrow I will collect the peasantry of Bothwell, and with those, and my own followers, you shall join Wallace the same night.”

Ignorant of the horrors of war, and only alive to the glory of the present cause, Helen sympathised in the ardour of her cousin, and with a thrill of sad delight hurried to her apartment to commence her task.

Far different were the sentiments of the young countess, her step-mother. As soon as Lord Mar had let this declaration

escape his lips, alarmed at the effect so much agitation might have on his enfeebled constitution, and fearful of the perilous cause he ventured thus openly to espouse, she desired his nephew to take the now comforted Halbert and see that he was attended with hospitality.

When the room was left to the earl and herself, she ventured to remonstrate with him upon the facility with which he had become a party in so treasonable a matter. "Consider, my lord," continued she, "that Scotland is now entirely in the power of the English monarch. His garrisons occupy our towns, his creatures hold every place of trust in the kingdom!"

"And is such a list of oppressions, my dear lady, to be an argument for longer bearing them? Had I, and other Scottish nobles, dared to resist this overwhelming power after the battle of Dunbar; had we, instead of kissing the sword that robbed us of our liberties, kept our own unsheathed within the bulwarks of our mountains, Scotland might now be free, and I should not have been insulted by our English tyrants in the streets of Lanark; and, to save my life, William Wallace would not now be mourning his murdered wife, and without a home to shelter him!"

Lady Mar paused at this observation, but resumed: "That may be true. But the die is cast; Scotland is lost for ever; and, by your attempting to assist your friend in this rash essay to recover it, you will only lose yourself also without preserving him. The project is wild and needless. What would you have? Now that the contention is past; now that Baliol has surrendered his crown to Edward, is not Scotland at peace?"

"A bloody peace, Joanna," answered the earl; "witness these wounds. A usurper's peace is more destructive than his open hostilities; plunder and assassination are its concomitants. I have now seen and felt enough of Edward's jurisdiction. It is time I should awake, and, like Wallace, determine to die for Scotland, or avenge her."

Lady Mar wept. "Cruel Donald; is this the reward of all my love and duty? You tear yourself from me, you consign your estates to sequestration, you rob your children of their name; nay, by your infectious example, you stimulate our brother Bothwell's son to head the band that is to join this madman, Wallace!"

"Hold, Joanna," cried the earl; "what is it I hear? You

call the hero who, in saving your husband's life, reduced himself to these cruel extremities, a *madman* ? Was he *mad* because he prevented the Countess of Mar from being a widow ? Was he *mad* because he prevented her children from being fatherless ? ”

The countess, overcome by this cutting reproach, threw herself upon her husband's neck. “ Alas ! my lord,” cried she, “ all is madness to me that would plunge you into danger. Think of your own safety ; of my innocent twins now in their cradle, should you fall. Think of our brother's feelings when you send his only son to join one he, perhaps, will call a rebel ! ”

“ If Earl Bothwell considered himself a vassal of Edward's he would not now be with Lord Loch-awe. From the moment that gallant Highlander retired to Argyleshire, the king of England regarded his adherents with suspicion. Bothwell's present visit to Loch-awe, you see, is sufficient to sanction the plunder of this castle by the *peaceful* government you approve. You saw the opening of those proceedings ! And had they come to their dreadful issue, where, my dear Joanna, would now be your home, your husband, your children ? It was the arm of the brave chief of Elderslie which saved them from destruction.”

Lady Mar shuddered. “ I admit the truth of what you say. But, oh ! is it not hard to put my all to the hazard ; to see the bloody field on one side of my beloved Donald, and the scaffold on the other ? ”

“ Hush ! ” cried the earl, “ it is justice that beckons me, and victory will receive me to her arms. Let, oh Power above ! ” exclaimed he, in the fervour of enthusiasm, “ let the victorious field for Scotland be Donald Mar's grave rather than doom him to live a witness of her miseries ! ”

“ I cannot stay to hear you ! ” answered the countess ; “ I must invoke the Virgin to give me courage to be a patriot's wife ; at present your words are daggers to me.”

In uttering this she hastily withdrew, and left the earl to muse on the past—to concert plans for the future.

CHAPTER VII.

BOTHWELL CASTLE.

MEANWHILE the Lady Helen had retired to her own apartments. Lord Mar's banner being brought to her from the armoury, she sat down to weave into its silken texture the amber locks of

the Scottish chief. Admiring their softness and beauty, while her needle flew, she pictured to herself the fine countenance they had once adorned.

The duller extremities of the hair, which a sadder liquid than that which now dropped from her eyes had rendered stiff and difficult to entwine with the warp of the silk, seemed to adhere to her fingers. Helen almost shrank from the touch. "Unhappy lady!" sighed she to herself; "what a pang must have rent her heart, when the stroke of so cruel a death tore her from such a husband! and how must he have loved her, when for her sake he thus forswears all future joys but those which camps and victories may yield! Ah! what would I give to be my cousin Murray, to bear this pennon at his side! What would I give to reconcile so admirable a being to happiness again—to weep his griefs, or smile him into comfort! To be that man's friend would be a higher honour than to be Edward's queen."

Her heart was thus discoursing with herself when a page opened the door, from her cousin, who begged admittance. She had just fastened the flowing charge into its azure field, and while embroidering the motto gladly assented.

"You know not, my good old man," said the gallant Murray to Halbert as he conducted him across the galleries, "what a noble mind is contained in that lovely young creature. I was brought up with her, and to her do I owe that love of true glory which carries me to the side of Sir William Wallace. The virtuous only can awaken any interest in her heart; I know she rejoices in my present destination. And to prevent her hearing from your own lips all you have now told me of the mild as well as heroic virtues of my intended commander—all you have said of the heroism of his wife—would be depriving her of a mournful pleasure, only to be appreciated by a heart such as hers."

The grey-haired bard of Elderslie, who had ever received the dearest rewards of his songs in the smiles of its mistress, did not require persuasion to appear before the gentle lady of Mar, or to recite in her ears the story of departed loveliness, fairer than poet ever feigned.

Helen rose as he and her cousin appeared. Murray approved the execution of her work: and Halbert, with a full heart, took the pennon in his hand. "Ah! little did my dear lady think," exclaimed he, "that one of these loved locks would ever be

suspended on a staff to lead men to battle ! What changes have a few days made ! She, the gentlest of women, laid in a bloody grave ; and he, the most benevolent of human beings, wielding an exterminating sword ! ”

“ You speak of her grave, venerable man,” inquired Helen ; “ had you then opportunity of performing the rites of sepulture to her remains ? ”

“ No, madam,” replied he ; “ after the worthy English soldier assisted me to place her precious body in my lord’s oratory, I had no opportunity of returning to give her a more holy grave.”

“ Alas ! ” cried Helen ; “ then her sacred relics have been consumed in the burning house ! ”

“ I hope not,” rejoined Halbert ; “ the chapel I speak of is at some distance from the main building. It was excavated in the rock by Sir Ronald Crawford, who gave the name of Elderslie to this estate, in compliment to Sir William’s place of birth in Renfrewshire, and bestowed it on the bridal pair.”

“ Then we may hope,” rejoined she, “ that the oratory has not only escaped the flames, but perhaps the access of the English soldiers ? Would it not comfort your lord to have that sweet victim entombed according to the rites of the Church ? ”

“ Surely, my lady ; but how can that be done ? He thinks her remains were lost in the conflagration of Elderslie ; and for fear of precipitating him into the new dangers which might have menaced him had he sought to bring away her body, I did not disprove his mistake.”

“ But her body shall be brought away,” rejoined Lady Helen ; “ it shall have holy burial.”

“ To effect this, command my services,” exclaimed Murray.

Helen thanked him for an assistance which would render the completion of her design easy. The English soldier as guide, and a troop from Bothwell must accompany him.

“ Alas ! my young lord,” interposed Halbert, “ suppose you should meet some of the English still loitering there ! ”

“ And what of that, my honest Halbert, would not I and my trusty band make them clear the way ? Shall anything in mortal shape make Andrew Murray turn his back ? No, Halbert, I was not born on Saint Andrew’s day for naught, and by his bright cross I swear either to lay Lady Wallace in the tomb of my ancestors, or to leave my bones to blanch on the grave of hers.”

Helen approved the resolution of her cousin ; and believing

that the now ravaged Elderslie had no attraction to hold marauders amongst its ruins, she dismissed Lord Andrew to make his preparations, and turned herself to prefer her suit accordingly to her father.

Ere Halbert withdrew, he respectfully put her hand to his lips. "Good night," continued she; "ere you see me again, I trust the earthly part of the angel now in paradise will be safe within these towers." He poured a thousand blessings on her head, and almost thought that he saw in her beautiful form one of heaven's inhabitants sent to bear away his dear mistress to her divine abode.

On entering her father's apartments, Lady Helen found him alone. She repeated to him the substance of her conversation with Wallace's faithful servant; "and my wish is," continued she, "to have the murdered lady's remains entombed in the cemetery of this castle."

The earl approved her request, with expressions of satisfaction at the filial affection which so lively a gratitude to his preserver evinced.

"May I then, my dear father," returned she, "have your permission to pay our debt of gratitude to Sir William Wallace to the utmost of our power?"

"You are at liberty, my noble child, to do as you please. My vassals, my coffers, are all at your command."

Helen kissed his hand. "May I have what I please from the Bothwell armoury?"

"Command even there," said the earl; "your uncle Bothwell is too true a Scot to grudge a sword in so pious a cause."

Helen threw her arms about her father's neck, thanking him tenderly, and with a beating heart retired to prosecute her plans. Murray, who met her in the ante-room, informed her that fifty men, the sturdiest in the glen, awaited her orders; while she, telling her cousin of the earl's approval, took the sacred banner in her hand, and followed him to the gallery in the hall.

The moment she appeared a shout of joy bade her welcome. Murray waved his hand in token of silence, while she smiled with the benignity that spoke her angel errand; "My brave friends!" said she, "I thank you for the ardour with which, by this night's enterprise, you assist me to pay, in part, the everlasting tribute due to the man who preserved to me the blessing of a father."

"And to us, noble lady," cried they, "the most generous of chiefs!"

"With that spirit, then," returned she, "I address ye with greater confidence. Who amongst you will shrink from following this standard to the field for Scotland's honour? Who will refuse to make himself the especial guardian of the life of Sir William Wallace? And who, in the moment of peril, will not stand by him to the last?"

"None are here," cried a young man, advancing before his fellows, "who would not gladly die in his defence."

"We swear it," burst from every lip at once.

She bowed her head, and said, "Return from Elderslie to-morrow with the bier of its sainted mistress. I will then bestow upon every man in this band, a war-bonnet plumed with my colours; and this banner shall then lead you to the side of Sir William Wallace. In the shock of battle look at its golden ensign, and remember that God not only *armeth the patriot's hand*, but shieldeth his heart. In this faith be ye the bucklers which heaven sends to guard the life of Wallace; and so honoured, exult in your station, and expect the future gratitude of Scotland."

"Wallace and Lady Helen! to death or liberty!" was the animated response to this exhortation; and smiling, and crossing her hands over her bosom, in token of thanks to them and to heaven, she retired in the midst of their acclamations. Murray, ready armed for his expedition, met her at the door. Restored to his usual vivacity by the spirit-moving emotions which the present scene awakened in his heart, he forgot the horrors which had aroused his zeal in the glory of some anticipated victory; and, giving her a gay salutation, led her back to her apartments, where the English soldier awaited her commands. Lady Helen, with a gentle grace, commended his noble resentment of Heselrigge's violence.

"Lands in Mar shall be yours," added she, "or a post of honour in the little army the earl is now going to raise. Speak but the word, and you shall find, worthy Englishman, that neither a Scotsman nor his daughter know what it is to be ungrateful."

The blood mounted into the soldier's cheek. "I thank you, sweetest lady, for this generous offer; but, as I am an Englishman, I dare not accept it. My arms are due to my own country; and whether I am tied to it by lands and posses-

sions, or have naught but my English blood, and my oath to my king to bind me, still I should be equally unwarranted in breaking those bonds. I left Heselrigge because he dishonoured my country ; and for me to forswear her would be to make myself infamous. Hence, all I ask is, that after I have this night obeyed your gracious commands, in leading your men to Elderslie, the Earl of Mar will allow me instantly to depart for the nearest port."

Lady Helen replied that she revered his sentiments too sincerely to insult them by any persuasions to the contrary ; and taking a diamond clasp from her bosom, she put it into his hand : " Wear that in remembrance of your virtue, and of Helen Mar's gratitude."

The man kissed it respectfully, and bowing, swore to preserve so distinguishing a gift to the latest hour of his existence.

Helen retired to her chamber to finish her task ; and Murray, bidding her good-night, repaired to the earl's apartments to take his final orders before he and his troop set out for the ruins of Elderslie.

CHAPTER VIII.

BOTHWELL CASTLE.

As soon as the sun arose, the Earl of Mar was carried from his chamber, and laid on a couch in the state apartment. His lady had not yet left the room of his daughter, by whose side she had lain the whole night, in hopes of infecting her with the fears which possessed herself.

Helen replied that she could see no reason for such apprehensions, if her father, instead of joining Wallace in person, would, when he had sent him succours, retire with his family into the Highlands, and there await the issue of the contest. " It is too late to retreat, dear madam," continued she ; " the first blow against the public enemy was struck in defence of Lord Mar : and would you have my father act so base a part as to abandon his preserver to the wrath such generous assistance has provoked ? "

" Alas, my child ! " answered the countess, " what great service will he have done to me, or to your father, if he deliver him from one danger only to plunge him into another ? Edward's power in this country is too great to be resisted now. Have not most of our barons sworn fealty to him ? and are

not the potent families of the Cummin, the Soulis, and the March, all in his interest? How, then, with such a host against him, can your infa'tuated father venture, without despair, to support the man who breaks the peace with England?"

"Who can despair," returned Helen, "in so just a cause? Let us rather believe with our good King David, that, 'Honour must hope always; for no real evil can befall the virtuous, either in this world or in the next!' Were I a man, the justice that leads on the brave Wallace would nerve my arm with the strength of a host. Besides, look at our country: God's gift of freedom is stamped upon it. Our mountains are his seal. Plains are the proper territories of tyranny: there the armies of a usurper may extend themselves with ease, leaving no corner unoccupied in which patriotism might shelter or treason hide. But mountains, glens, morasses, lakes, set bounds to conquest; and amidst these stands the impregnable seat of liberty. To such a fortress, to the deep defiles of Loch-Katrine, or to the cloud-curtained heights of Corryarraick, I would have my father retire. In safety he may there watch the footsteps of our mountain-goddess, till led by her immortal champion, she plants her standard again upon the hills of Scotland."

The complexion of the animated Helen shone with a radiant glow.

Lady Mar looked at her. "It is well, romantic girl, that you are of my own powerless sex: had it been otherwise, your rash-headed disobedience might have made me rue the day I became your father's wife."

"Sex," returned Helen, mildly, "could not have altered my sense of duty. Whether man or woman, I would obey you in all things consistent with my duty to a higher power; but when that commands, then, by the ordinance of heaven, we must 'leave father and mother, and cleave unto it.'"

"And what, O foolish Helen! do you call a higher duty than that of a child to a parent, or a husband to his wife?"

"Duty of any kind," respectfully answered the young daughter of Mar, "cannot be transgressed with innocence. Nor would it be any relinquishing of duty to you, should my father leave you to take up arms in the assertion of his country's rights. Her rights are your safety; and therefore, in defending them, a husband or a son best shows his sense of domestic, as well as of public duty."

“ Who taught you this sophistry, Helen ? Not your heart, for it would start at the idea of your father’s blood.”

Helen turned pale. “ Perhaps, madam, had not the preservation of my father’s blood occasioned such malignity from the English, that nothing but an armed force can deliver his preserver, I too might be content to see Scotland in slavery. But now, to wish my father to shrink behind the excuse of far-strained family duties, and to abandon Sir William Wallace to the bloodhounds who hunt his life, would be to devote the name of Mar to infamy, and deservedly bring a curse upon his offspring.”

“ Then it is to preserve Sir William Wallace you are thus anxious. My husband, his vassals, your cousin, and, in short, the sequestration of the estates of Mar and Bothwell are all to be put to the hazard on account of a frantic outlaw, to whom, since the loss of his wife, I should suppose, death would be preferable to any gratitude we can pay him.”

Lady Helen, at this ungrateful language, inwardly thanked heaven that she inherited no part of the blood which animated so unfeeling a heart. “ That he is an outlaw, Lady Mar, springs from us. I do not, then, blush for making his preservation my first prayer ; and that he may achieve the freedom of Scotland is my second.”

“ We shall see whose prayers will be answered first,” returned Lady Mar, rising coldly from her seat. “ My saints are perhaps nearer than yours, and before the close of this day you will have reason to repent such extravagant opinions. I do not understand them.”

“ Till now you never disapproved them.”

“ I allowed them in your infancy,” returned the countess, “ because I thought they went no further than a minstrel’s song ; but since they are become so dangerous, I rue the hour in which I complied with the entreaties of Sir Richard Maitland, and permitted you and your sister to remain at Thirlestane, to imbibe these romantic ideas from the wizard of Ercildown.* Had not Sir Richard been your own mother’s father, I would not have been so easily prevailed on ; and thus am I rewarded for my indulgence.”

“ I hope, honoured madam,” said Helen, still wishing to

* Few personages are so renowned in tradition as Thomas of Ercildown, usually called *The Rhymor*. He was a poet and a sage, and believed by his contemporaries to be a prophet. He was born at Ercildown, a village on the Leeder (or Lauder), where the ruins of his paternal castle, called Learmont Tower, still remain.

soften the displeasure of her stepmother, "I hope you will never be ill-rewarded for that indulgence, either by my grandfather, my sister, or myself. Isabella, in the quiet of Thirlestane, has no chance of giving you the offence that I do ; and I am forced to offend you, because I cannot disobey my conscience." A tear stood in the eye of Lady Helen. "Cannot you, dear Lady Mar," continued she, forcing a smile, "pardon the daughter of your early friend, my mother, who loved you as a sister ? Cannot you forgive her Helen for revering justice even more than your favour ?"

More influenced by the sweet humility of her daughter-in-law than by the ingenious eloquence with which she maintained her sentiments, or with the appeal to the memory of the first Lady Mar, the countess relaxed the frigid air she had assumed ; and kissing her, with many renewed injunctions to bless the hand that might put a final stop to so ruinous an enthusiasm in her family, she quitted the room.

As soon as Helen was alone, she forgot the narrow-minded arguments of the countess ; and calling to recollection the generous permission with which her father had endowed her the night before, she wrapped herself in her mantle, and attended by her page, proceeded to the armoury. The armourer was already there, having just given out arms for three hundred men, who, by the earl's orders, were to assemble by noon on Bothwell Moor.

Helen told the man she came for the best suit of armour in his custody—"one of the most excellent proof."

He drew from an oaken chest a coat of black mail, studded with gold. Helen admired its strength and beauty. "It is the richest in all Scotland," answered he ; "and was worn by our great Canmore in all his victories."

"Then it is worthy its destination. Bring it, with its helmet and sword, to my apartment."

The armourer took it up ; and, accompanied by the page carrying the lighter parts, followed her into the western tower.

When Helen was again alone, it being yet very early in the morning, she employed herself in pluming the casque, and forming the scarf she meant should adorn her present. Thus time flew, till the sand-glass told her it was the eighth hour. But ere she had finished her task, she was roused from the profound stillness in which that part of the castle lay, by the doleful lament of the troop returning from Elderslie.

She dropped the half-formed scarf from her hand ; and listened, without daring to draw her breath, to the deep-toned lamentations. She thought that she had never before heard the dirge of her country so piercing, so thrillingly awful. Her head fell on the armour and scarf. "Sweet lady!" sighed she to herself, "who is it that dares thus invade thy duties! But my gratitude—gratitude to thy once-loved lord, will not offend thy pure spirit!" Again the mournful wailings rose on the air ; and with a convulsion of feelings she could not restrain, she threw herself on her knees, and leaning her head on the newly-adorned helmet, wept profusely.

Murray entered the room unobserved. "Helen! my dear cousin!" cried he. She started, and rising, apologised for her tears by owning the truth. He now told her that the body of the deceased lady was deposited in the chapel of the castle : and that the priests from the adjacent priory only awaited her presence to consign it, with the Church's rites, to its tomb.

Helen retired for a few minutes to recover herself ; and then re-entering covered with a black veil, was led by her cousin to the awful scene.

The bier lay before the altar. The prior of Saint Fillan, in his holy vestments, stood at its head ; a band of monks were ranged on each side. The maids of Lady Helen, in mourning garments, met their mistress at the portal. They had wrapped the beautiful corpse in the shroud prepared for it ; and now having laid it, strewn with flowers, upon the bier, they advanced to their trembling lady, expecting her to approve their services. Helen drew near—she bowed to the priests. One of the women put her hand on the pall to uncover the once lovely face of the murdered Marion. Lady Helen hastily resisted the woman's motion, by laying her hand also upon the pall. The chill of death struck through the velvet to her touch. She turned pale ; and waving her hand to the prior to begin, the bier was lowered by the priests into the tomb beneath. As it descended, Helen sunk upon her knees, and the anthem for departed souls was raised. The women of Lady Helen again chanted forth their melancholy wailings for the dead ; and, unable longer to bear the scene, she grasped the arm of her cousin, and with difficulty walked from the chapel.

CHAPTER IX.

ST. FILLANS.

HAVING rewarded his trusty followers with their promised war-bonnets from the hand of Helen, and despatched them onward to the foot of Cartlane Craigs, to await his arrival with the larger levy, Murray proceeded to the apartments of Lord Mar to inform him how far he had executed his commands, and to learn his future orders. He found the veteran earl surrounded by arms and armed men; fifty brave Scots, who were to lead the three hundred then on Bothwell Moor, were receiving their spears and swords, and other weapons, from the hands of their lord.

"Bear these stoutly, my gallant countrymen," cried he, "and remember, that although the dragon* of England has burnt up your harvests, and laid our homes in ashes, there is yet a lion in Scotland to wither his power, and glut you with his spoil!"

The interest of the scene, and the clatter of the arms he was dispensing, prevented anybody present hearing any sound of what was taking place beyond the room. But the earl had hardly uttered these words when the double doors of the apartment were abruptly opened, and all eyes were blasted by the sudden sight of Lord Soulis,† and a man in splendid English armour, with a train of Southron soldiers, following the recreant Scot.

The earl started from his couch. "Lord Soulis! what is the occasion of this unapprised visit?"

"The ensign of the liege lord of Scotland is my warrant," replied he: "you are my prisoner; and in the name of King Edward of England I take possession of this castle."

"Never!" cried the earl, "while there is a man's arm within it."

"Man and woman," returned Lord Soulis, "must surrender to Edward. Three thousand English have seized three hundred of your insurgents on Bothwell Moor. The castle is surrounded and resistance impossible. Throw down your arms!"

* The standard of Edward I. was a golden dragon—a very ancient British standard, but derived from pagan times.

† William de Soulis was a powerful chief in the South of Scotland. He founded pretensions to the Scottish crown on his descent from an illegitimate daughter of Alexander II. Soulis was a traitor to his country, and so notoriously wicked, that tradition endows him with the power of infernal necromancy. His castle of Hearnikege, in Teviotdale, is still shown as the resort of malignant demons.

cried he, turning to the clansmen, who thronged round their chief, "or be hanged for rebellion against your lawful sovereign !"

"Our lawful sovereign !" returned a young man who stood near him, "must be the enemy of Edward ; and to none else will we yield our arms !"

"Traitor !" cried the English commander, while with a sudden and dreadful stroke of his battle-axe he laid the body of the generous Scot a headless corpse at his feet. A cry proceeded from his enraged comrades. Every sword was drawn ; and before the bewildered and soul-struck earl could utter a word, the Furies blew their most horrible blast through the chamber ; and the half-frantic Mar beheld his brave Scots, at one moment victorious, and in the next the floor strewn with their dead bodies. A new succession of blood-hounds had rushed in at every door ; and before the exterminating sword was allowed to rest, the whole of his faithful troops lay around him, wounded and dying. Several had fallen across his body, having warded with their lives the strokes they believed levelled at him. In vain his voice had called upon his men to surrender—in vain he had implored the iron-hearted Soulis, and his coadjutor Aymer de Valence, to stop the havoc of death.

All now lay in blood ; and the heat of the room, thronged by the victors, became so intolerable that De Valence, for his own sake, ordered the earl to be removed into another apartment.

Meanwhile, unconscious of these events, Helen had lain down on her bed to seek a few minutes' repose ; and having watched the whole of the preceding night, was sunk into a profound sleep.

Murray, who was present at the abrupt entrance of the enemy, no sooner heard them declare that the castle was surrounded by a comparatively large army, than he foresaw all would be lost. On the instant, and before the dreadful signal of carnage was given in the fall of the young Scot, he slid behind the canopy of his uncle's couch ; and lifting the arras, by a back door which led to some private rooms, hastily made his way to the chamber of his cousin. As he hurried along he heard a fearful shout. He paused for a moment, but thinking it best, whatever might have happened, to secure the safety of Helen, he flew onward, and entered her room.

She lay upon the bed in a deep sleep. "Awake! Helen," he cried, "for your life, awake!"

She opened her eyes; but, without allowing her time to speak, he hastily added, "The castle is full of armed men, led hither by the English commander, Aymer de Valence, and the execrable Soulis. Unless you fly through the vaulted passage you will be their prisoner."

Helen gazed at him in terror. "Where is my father? Leave him, I cannot."

"Fly, in pity to your father! Oh, do not hesitate! What will be his anguish, should you fall into the hands of the furious man whose love you have rejected, when it will no longer be in the power of a parent to preserve your person from the outrages of his passion! If you had seen Soulis's threatening eyes—" He was interrupted by a clamour in the opposite gallery, and the shrieks of women. Helen grasped his arm. "Alas, my poor damsels! I will go with you, whither you will, to be far from him."

As Murray threw his arm about her waist, to impel her failing steps, his eyes fell on the banner and the suit of armour.

"All else must be left," exclaimed he, seizing the banner; and hurrying Helen forward, he hastened with her down the stairs which led from the western watch-tower to the vaults beneath the castle. On entering the first cellar, to which a dim light was admitted through a small grating near the top, he looked round for the archway that contained the avenue of their release. Having descried it, and raised one of the large flags which paved the floor, he assisted his affrighted cousin down a short flight of steps into the secret passage. "This," whispered he, "will carry us in a direct line to the cell of the prior of St. Fillan."

"But what will become of my father and Lady Mar? This flight while they are in danger! oh, I fear to complete it!"

"Rather fear the libertine Soulis," returned Murray; "he can only make them prisoners; and even that injury shall be of short duration. I will soon join the brave Wallace; and then, my sweet cousin, liberty and a happy meeting!"

"Alas! his venerable harper," cried she, suddenly remembering Halbert; "should he be discovered to have belonged to Wallace, he, too, will be massacred by these merciless men."

Murray stopped. "Have you courage to remain in this

darkness alone ? If so, I will seek him, and he shall accompany us."

Helen had courage for anything but the dangers Murray might encounter by returning into the castle ; but the generous youth had entered too fully into her apprehensions concerning the old man to be withheld. " Should I be delayed in coming back," said he, recollecting the possibility of himself being attacked and slain, " go forward to the end of this passage ; it will lead you to a flight of stairs ; ascend them, and by drawing the bolt of a door, you will find yourself at once in the prior's."

" Talk not of delay," replied Helen ; " return quickly, and I will await you at the entrance of the passage." So saying, she swiftly retraced with him her steps to the bottom of the stone stairs by which they had descended. He raised the flag, sprung out of the aperture, and closing it down, left her in solitude and darkness.

Murray passed through the first cellar, and was proceeding to the second (among the catacombs of which lay the concealed entrance to the private stairs), when he saw the great gates of the cellar open, and a large party of English soldiers enter. They were conducted by the butler of the castle, who seemed to perform his office very unwillingly, while they crowded in, thirsty and riotous.

Aware how unequal his single arm would be to contend with such numbers, Murray, at the first glance of these plunderers, retreated behind a heap of casks in a remote corner. While the trembling butler was loading a dozen of the men with flasks for the refreshment of their masters above, the rest were helping themselves from the adjacent catacombs. Some left the cellars with their booty, and others remained to drink it on the spot. Glad to escape the insults of the soldiers, who lay wallowing in the wine, Bothwell's old servant quitted the cellar with the last company which bore flagons to their comrades above.

Murray listened anxiously, in hopes of hearing from his garrulous neighbours some intimation of the fate of his uncle and aunt. He hearkened in vain, for nothing was uttered by these intoxicated banditti but loud boastings of the number each had slain in the earl's apartment, execrations against the Scots for their obstinate resistance, and a thousand sanguinary wishes that the nation had but one neck to strike off at a blow.

When all seemed hushed, he ventured forth with a stealing step towards the slumbering group. Like his brave ancestor, Gaul the son of Morni, "he disdained to stab a sleeping foe!" He must pass them to reach the private stairs. He paused and listened. Silence still reigned; not even a hand moved, so deeply were they sunk in the fumes of wine. He took courage, and flew to the secret door. As he laid his hand on it, it opened from without, and two persons appeared. By the few rays which gleamed from the expiring torches of the sleepers he could see that the first wore English armour. Murray believed himself lost; but determined to sell his life dearly, he made a spring, and caught the man by the throat, when some one seizing his arm, exclaimed, "Stop, my Lord Murray! it is the faithful Grimsby." Murray let go his hold, glad to find that both his English friend and the venerable object of his solicitude were thus providentially brought to meet him; but fearing that the violence of his action and Halbert's exclamation might have alarmed the sleeping soldiers (who, drunk as they were, were too numerous to be resisted), he laid his finger on the lip of Grimsby, and motioned to the astonished pair to follow him.

As they advanced, they perceived one of the soldiers move as if disturbed. Murray held his sword over the sleeping wretch, ready to plunge it into his heart should he attempt to rise: but he became still again; and the fugitives having approached the flag, Murray drew it up, and eager to haven his double charge, he thrust them together down the stairs. At that moment a shriek from Helen (who had discovered by the gleam of light which burst into the vault a man descending in English armour), echoed through the cellars. Two of the soldiers jumped upon their feet and rushed upon Murray. He had let the flag drop behind him; but still remaining by it, in case of an opportunity to escape, he received the stroke of their weapons upon his target, and returned them with equal rapidity. One assailant lay gasping at his feet. But the clashing of arms and the cries of the survivor had already awakened the whole crew. With horrid menaces they threw themselves towards the young Scot, and would certainly have cut him to pieces had he not snatched the only remaining torch out of the hand of a staggering soldier, and extinguished it under his foot. Bewildered where to find their prey, with threats and imprecations, they groped in darkness, slashing the

air with their swords, and not infrequently wounding each other in the vain search.

Murray was now far from their pursuit. He had no sooner put out the light than he pulled up the flag, and leaping down, drew it after him, and found himself in safety. Desperate as was the contest, it had been short, for he yet heard the footsteps of the panic-struck Helen flying along the passage. The Englishman and Halbert, on the first falling of the flag, not knowing its spring, had unsuccessfully tried to re-raise it, that they might assist Murray in the tumult above. On his appearing again so unexpectedly, they declared their joy; but the young lord, impatient to calm the apprehensions of his cousin, returned no other answer than "Follow me!" while he darted forward. Terror had given her wings, and even prevented her hearing the low sounds of Murray's voice, which he durst not raise to a higher pitch for fear of being overheard by the enemy. Thus, while she lost all presence of mind, he did not come up with her till she fell breathless against the stairs at the extremity of the vault.

As soon as Murray found her within his arms he clasped her insensible form to his breast, and, carrying her up the steps, drew the bolt of the door. It opened to his pressure and discovered a large monastic cell, into which the daylight shone through one long narrow window. A straw pallet, an altar, and a marble basin, were the furniture. The cell was solitary, the owner being then at mass in the chapel of the monastery. Murray laid down his death-like burden on the monk's bed. He then ventured (believing, as it was to restore so pure a being to life, it could not be sacrilege) to throw some of the holy water upon his cousin's face, and by means of a little chalice, which stood upon the altar, he poured some into her mouth. At last opening her eyes, she recognised the figure of her young kinsman leaning over her. The almost paralysed Halbert stood at her feet. "Blessed Virgin! am I yet safe, and with my dear Andrew! Oh! I feared you were slain!" cried she, bursting into tears.

"Thank God, we are both safe," answered he; "comfort yourself, my beloved cousin! you are now on holy ground; this is the cell of the prior of St. Fillan. None but the hand of an infidel dare wrest you from this sanctuary."

"But my father and Lady Mar?" And again her tear flowed.

"The countess, my gracious lady," answered Halbert, "since you could not be found in the castle, is allowed to accompany your father to Dumbarton Castle, there to be treated with every respect, until De Valence receives further orders from King Edward."

"But for Wallace!" cried she, "ah, where are now the succours that were to be sent to him! And without succours, how can he, or you, dearest Andrew, rescue my father from this tyranny?"

"Do you despair," replied Murray; "look but at the banner you held fast, even while insensible; your own hands have engraven my answer—*God armeth the patriot!* Convinced of that, can you still fear for your father! I will join Wallace to-morrow. Your own fifty warriors await me at the bottom of Cartlane Craigs; and if any treachery should be meditated against my uncle, that moment we will make the towers of Dumbarton shake to their foundation."

Helen's reply was a deep sigh: she thought it might be heaven's will that her father, like the good Lord Douglas, should fall a victim to royal revenge; and so sad were her forebodings, that she hardly dared to hope what the sanguine disposition of her cousin promised. Grimsby now came forward; and unloosing an iron box from under his arm, put it into the hands of Lord Murray.

"This fatal treasure," said he, "was committed to my care by the earl, your uncle, to deliver to the prior of St. Fillans."

"What does it contain?" demanded Murray: "I never saw it before."

"I know not its contents," returned the soldier; "it belongs to Sir William Wallace."

"Indeed!" ejaculated Helen. "If it be treasure, why was it not rather sent to him!"

"But how, honest soldier," asked Murray, "did you escape with it, and Halbert too? I am at a loss to conjecture, but by miracle." He replied, that as soon as the English, and their Scottish partisans under Lord Soulis, had surprised the castle, he saw that his only chance of safety was to throw off the bonnet and plaid, and mix amongst the numerous soldiers who had taken possession of the gates. His armour and his language showed he was their countryman; and they easily believed that he had joined the plunderers as a volunteer from the army, which at a greater distance beleaguered the castle.

The story of his desertion from the Lanark garrison had not yet reached those of Glasgow and Dumbarton; and one or two men, who had known him in former expeditions, readily reported that he had been drafted into the present one. Their recognition warranted his truth; and he had no difficulty, after the carnage in the state apartment, to make his way to the bed-chamber where Lord Aymer de Valence had ordered Lord Mar to be carried. He found the earl alone, and lost in grief. He knew not but that his nephew, and even his daughter and wife, had fallen beneath the impetuous swords of the enemy. Astonished at seeing the soldier walking at large, he expressed his surprise with some suspicions. But Grimsby told him the stratagem he had used, and assured him Lord Andrew had not been seen since the onset. This information inspired the earl with a hope that his nephew might have escaped: and when the soldier also said that he had seen the countess led by Lord Soulis across the hall towards the Lady Helen's apartments, while he overheard him promising them every respect, the earl seemed comforted. "But how," inquired he of Grimsby, "has this hard fate befallen us? Have you learned how De Valence knew that I meant to take up arms for my country?"

When the soldier was relating this part of the conference, Murray interrupted him with the same demand.

"On that head I can fully satisfy you," replied he; "I could only gather from the soldiers that a sealed packet had been delivered to Lord Aymer de Valence late last night at Dumbarton Castle. Soulis was then there; and he immediately set off to Glasgow for the followers he had left in that town. Early this morning he joined De Valence and his legions on Bothwell Moor. The consequence there you know. But they do not end at Bothwell. The gallant Wallace——"

"What of him?" exclaimed Murray.

"No personal harm has yet happened to Sir William Wallace," replied Grimsby; "but at the same moment in which De Valence gave orders for his troops to march to Bothwell, he sent others to intercept that persecuted knight's escape from the Cartlane Craigs."

"That accursed sealed packet," cried Murray, "has been the traitor! Some villain in Bothwell Castle must have written it. Whence else could have come the double information? And if so," added he, with tremendous emphasis, "may the blast of slavery ever pursue him and his posterity!"

Helen shuddered, as the amen to this frightful malediction was echoed by the voices of Halbert and the soldier. The latter continued :

“ When I informed Lord Mar of these measures against Wallace, he expressed a hope that your first detachment to his assistance might, with yourself, perhaps, at its head, elude their vigilance, and join his friend. This discourse reminded him of the iron box. ‘ It is in that closet,’ said his lordship, pointing to an opposite door ; ‘ you will find it beneath the little altar before which I pay my daily duties to the All-wise dispenser of the fates of men ; else where would be my confidence now ? Take it thence, and buckle it to your side.’ I obeyed ; and he then proceeded—‘ There are two passages in this house which lead to sanctuary. The one nearest to us is the safest for you. A staircase from the closet you have just left will lead you directly into the chapel. When there hasten to the image of the Virgin, and slip aside the marble tablet on the back of the pedestal : it will admit you to a flight of steps ; descend them, and at the bottom you will find a door that will convey you into a range of cellars. Lift up the largest flag-stone in the second, and you will be conducted through a dark vault to an iron door ; draw the bolt, and remain in the cell it will open to you till the owner enters. He is the prior of St. Fillan’s, and a Murray. Give him this golden cross, which he well knows, as a mark you come from me ; and say it is my request that he assist you to gain the seashore. As for the iron box, tell him to preserve it as his life, and never to give it up, but to myself, my children, or to Sir William Wallace, its rightful master.’ ”

“ Alas ! ” cried Halbert, “ that he had never been its owner ! that he had never brought it to Elderslie to draw down misery on his head ! Ill-omened trust ! whatever it contains, its presence carries blood and sorrow in its train. Wherever it has been deposited, war and murder have followed : I trust my dear master will never see it more ! ”

“ He may indeed never see it more ! ” murmured Helen, in a low voice. “ Where are now my proud anticipations of freedom to Scotland ? Alas ! Andrew,” said she, taking his hand, and weeping over it, “ I have been too presumptuous ; my father is a prisoner, and Sir William Wallace is lost ! ”

“ Cease, my dear Helen,” cried he, “ cease to distress yourself ! These are merely the vicissitudes of the great con-

tention we are engaged in. We must expect occasional disappointments, or look for miracles every day. Such disasters are sent as lessons to teach us precaution, promptitude, and patience—these are the soldier's graces, my sweet cousin, and, depend on it, I will pay them due obedience."

"But why," asked Helen, taking comfort from the unsubdued spirits of her cousin, "why, my good soldier, did not my dear father take advantage of this sanctuary?"

"I urged the earl to accompany me," returned Grimsby; "but he said such a proceeding would leave his wife and babes in unprotected captivity. 'No,' added he, 'I will await my fate; for the God of those who trust in Him knows that I do not fear.'"

"Having received such peremptory orders from the earl, I took my leave, and entering the chapel by the way he directed, was agreeably surprised to find the worthy Halbert, whom, never having seen since the funeral obsequies, I supposed had fallen during the carnage in the state-chamber. He was still kneeling by the tomb of his buried mistress. I did not take long to warn him of his danger, and desired him to follow me. We descended together beneath the holy statue, and were just emerging into the cellars, when you, sir, met us at the entrance.

"It was while we were yet in the chapel that I heard De Valence and Soulis at high words in the courtyard. The former, in a loud voice, gave orders that, as Lady Helen Mar could nowhere be found, the earl and countess, with their two infant children, should not be separated, but be conveyed as his prisoners to Dumbarton Castle."

"That is a comfort," cried Helen; "my father will then be consoled by the presence of his wife."

"But very different would have been the case, madam, had you appeared," rejoined the soldier. "One of Lord de Valence's men told me that Lord Soulis intended to have taken you and the countess to Dunglass Castle, near Glasgow, while the sick earl was to have been carried alone to Dumbarton, and detained in solitary confinement. Lord Soulis was in so dreadful a rage, when you could not be found, that he accused the English commander of having leagued with Lady Mar to deceive him. In the midst of this contention we descended into the vaults."

Helen shuddered at the thought of how near she was to

falling into the hands of so fierce a spirit. In his character he united every quality which could render power formidable, combining prodigious bodily strength with cruelty, dissimulation, and treachery. He was feared by the common people as a sorcerer, and avoided by the virtuous of his own rank as an enemy to all public law, and the violator of every private tie. Helen Mar had twice refused his hand: first, during the contest for the kingdom, when his pretended claim to the crown was disallowed. She was then a mere child, hardly more than fourteen, but she rejected him with abhorrence. At the fall of Dunbar, when he again founded his uprising on the ruins of his country, as soon as he had repeated his oaths of fidelity to Edward, he hastened to Thirlestane, to throw himself a second time at the feet of Lady Helen. Her ripened judgment confirmed her youthful dislike of his ruffian qualities, and again he was rejected.

"By the powers of hell," exclaimed he, when the project of surprising Bothwell was imparted to him, "if I once get that proud minion into my grasp, she shall be mine as I will, and learn to beg for even a look from the man who has humbled her!"

Helen knew not half the afflictions with which his resentful heart had meditated to subdue and torture her; and therefore, though she shrank at the sound of a name so generally infamous, yet, not aware of all the evils she had escaped, she replied with languor, though with gratitude, to the almost rapturous congratulations of her cousin on her timely flight.

At this period the door of the cell opened, and the prior entered from the cloisters—he started on seeing his room filled with strangers. Murray took off his helmet, and approached him. On recognising the son of his patron, the prior inquired his commands, and expressed some surprise that such a company, and above all, a lady, could have passed the convent gate without his previous notice.

Murray pointed to the recess behind the altar, and then explained to the good priest the necessity which had compelled them to thus seek the protection of Saint Fillan. "Lady Helen," continued he, "must share your care until heaven empowers the Earl of Mar to reclaim his daughter, and adequately reward this holy church."

The soldier then presented the cross, with the iron box, repeating the message that confided them also to his keeping.

The prior listened to these recitals with sorrowful attention. He had heard the noise of armed men advancing to the castle, but knowing that the earl was making warlike preparations, he had no suspicion that these were other than the Bothwell soldiers. He took the box, and laying it on the altar, pressed the cross to his lips. "The Earl of Mar shall find that fidelity here which his faith in the Church merits. That mysterious chest, to which you tell me so terrible a denunciation is annexed, shall be preserved sacred as the relics of Saint Fillan."

Halbert groaned heavily at these words, but he did not speak. The father looked at him attentively, and then proceeded: "But for you, virtuous Southron, I will give a pilgrim's habit. Travel in that privileged garb to Montrose, and there a brother of the church, the prior of Aberbrothick, will, by a letter from me, convey you in a vessel to Normandy; thence you may safely find your way to Guienne."

The soldier bowed his head; and the priest, turning to Lady Helen, told her that a cell should be appointed for her, and some pious woman brought from the adjoining hamlet to pay her due attendance.

"As for this venerable man," continued he, "his silver hairs already proclaim him near his heavenly country! He had best put on the cowl of the holy brotherhood, and in the arms of religion repose securely till he passes through the sleep of death to wake in everlasting life!"

Tears started into the eyes of Halbert. "I thank you, reverend father; I have indeed drawn near the end of my pilgrimage—too old to serve my dear master in fields of blood and hardship, I will at least devote my last hours to uniting my prayers with his, and all good souls, for the repose of his sainted lady—I accept your invitation thankfully; and, considering it a call from heaven to give me rest, I welcome the day that marks the poor harper of Elderslie with the sacred tonsor."

The sound of approaching trumpets, and, soon after, the clattering of horses and the clang of armour made an instantaneous silence in the cell. Helen looked fearfully at her cousin, and grasped his hand; Murray clasped his sword with a firmer hold. "I will protect you with my life." He spoke in a low tone, but the soldier heard him. "There is no cause of alarm," rejoined he, "Lord de Valence is only marching by on his way to Dumbarton."

"Alas, my poor father!" cried Helen, covering her face with her hands.

The venerable prior knelt down by her: "My daughter, be comforted," said he; "they dare not commit any violence on the earl. King Edward too well understands his own interest to allow even a long imprisonment to so popular a nobleman."

The prior, seeing her composed, recommended leaving her to rest. And Helen, comforted by holy meditations, allowing her cousin to depart, he led Murray and his companions into the convent library.

CHAPTER X.

THE CHAPTER-HOUSE.

THE march of De Valence from the castle having proved that no suspicion of any of its late inhabitants being still in the neighbourhood remained with its usurpers, Grimsby thought he might depart in safety; and next morning he begged permission of the prior to commence his journey. "I am anxious to quit a land," said he, "where my countrymen are committing violences which make me blush at the name of Englishman."

Murray put a purse of gold into the soldier's hand, while the prior covered his armour with a pilgrim's gown. Grimsby, with a respectful bow, returned the gift: "I cannot take money from you, my lord. But bestow on me the sword at your side, and that I will preserve for ever."

Murray took it off and gave it to the soldier. "Let me exchange, my brave friend!" said he; "give me yours, and it shall be a memorial to me of having found virtue in an Englishman."

Grimsby unlocked his rude weapon in a moment, and as he put the iron hilt into the young Scot's hand, a tear stood in his eye. "When you raise this sword against my countrymen, think on Grimsby, a faithful though humble soldier of the cross, and spare the blood of all who ask for mercy."

Murray looked a gracious assent, for the tear of mercy was infectious. Without speaking, he gave the good soldier's hand a parting grasp; and with regret that superior claims called so brave a man from his side, he saw him leave the monastery.

The mourner banquets on memory, making that which seems the poison of life its aliment.

So Murray judged when the poor old harper, finding himself alone with him, again gave loose to his often-recapitulated griefs. He wept like an infant; and recounting the afflictions of his master, while bewailing the disasters at Bothwell, implored Murray to go without delay to support the now almost friendless Wallace. Murray was consoling him with the assurance that he would set off for the mountains that very evening, when the prior returned to conduct Halbert to a cell appointed for his noviciate. The good priest had placed one of his most pious fathers there, to administer both temporal and spiritual cordials to the aged sufferer.

The sorrowing domestic of Wallace being thus disposed of, the prior and Murray remained together, consulting on the safest means of passing to the Cartlane hills. A lay brother whom the prior had sent in pursuit of Helen's fifty warriors, to apprise them of the English being in the craigs, at this juncture entered the library. He informed the father that, secure in his religious garb, he had penetrated many of the Cartlane defiles, but could neither see nor hear anything of the party. Every glen or height was occupied by the English, and from a woman, of whom he begged a draught of milk, he had learned how closely the mountains were invested. The English commander, in his zeal to prevent provisions being conveyed to Wallace and his famishing garrison, had stopped a procession of monks bearing a dead body to the sepulchral cave of Saint Columba. He would not allow them to ascend the heights until he had examined whether the bier really bore a corpse, or was a vehicle to carry food to the beleaguered Scots.

In the midst of this information the prior and his friends were startled by a shout, and soon after a tumult of voices, in which might be distinguished the cry of "A gallows for the traitor!"

"Our brave Englishman has fallen into their hands," cried Murray, hastening towards the door.

"What would you do?" interrupted the prior, holding him. "Your single arm could not save the soldier. The cross has more power, I will seek these violent men. Meanwhile stay here, as you value the lives of all in the convent."

Murray had now recollected himself, and acquiesced. The

prior took the crucifix from the altar, and ordering the porter to throw open the great doors he appeared before a turbulent band of soldiers who were dragging a man along, fast bound with their leathern belts. Blood, trickling from his face, fell on the hands of the ruthless wretches, who were threatening him with instant death.

The prior, raising the cross, rushed in amongst them, and, in the name of the blessed Son Who died on that tree, bade them stand ! The soldiers trembled before the majesty of his figure, and at his adjuration. The prior looked on the prisoner, but he did not see the dark locks of the Englishman ; it was the yellow hair of Scotland that mingled with the blood on his forehead.

“ Whither do you hurry that wounded man ? ”

“ To his death,” answered a surly fellow.

“ What is his offence ? ”

“ He is a traitor.”

“ How has he proved it ? ”

“ He is a Scot, and he belongs to the disloyal lord of Mar. This bugle, with its crowned falcon, proves it,” added the Southron, holding up the very bugle which the earl had sent by Halbert to Wallace, and which was ornamented with the crest of Mar wrought in gold.

“ That this has been Lord Mar’s,” replied the prior, “ there is no doubt, but may not this man have found it ? Or may it not have been given to him by the earl, before that chief incurred the displeasure of King Edward ? Which of you would think it just to be made to die because your friend was condemned to the scaffold ? Unless you substantiate your charge against this man, by a better proof than this bugle, his death would be a murder, which the Lord of life will requite in the perdition of your souls.” As the father spoke, he again elevated the cross : the men turned pale.

“ I am a minister of Christ,” continued he, “ and must be the friend of justice. Release, therefore, that wounded man to me. Before the altar of the Searcher of all hearts he shall confess himself ; and if I find that he is guilty unto death, I promise you by the holy St. Fillan’s to release him to your commanding officer, and so let justice take its course. But if he proves innocent, I am the soldier of Christ, and no monarch on earth shall wrest His children from the protection of the Church.”

While he spake, the men who held the prisoner let go their hold, and the prior stretching out his hand to him, gave him to a party of monks to conduct into the convent. Then, to convince the soldiers that it was the man's life he sought to save, and not the spoil, he returned the golden bugle, and bade them depart in peace.

Awed by the father's address, and satisfied with the money and arms of which they had rifled the stranger, the marauders retreated, determining, indeed, to say nothing of the matter to the officer in the castle, lest he should demand the horn; and elated with the present booty, they marched off to pursue their plundering excursion. Bursting into yeomen's houses and peasants' huts, stripping all of their substance who did or did not swear fealty to Edward, thus robbing the latter, and exacting contributions from the former, while vain prayers for mercy, and unanswered cries for redress, echoed dolefully through the vale of Bothwell, they sped gaily on, as if murder were pastime, and rapine honour.

The prior, on returning into the convent, ordered the gates to be bolted. When he entered the chapter-house, finding the monks had already bound up the wounds of the stranger, he made a sign for the brethren to withdraw, and then approaching the young man, "My son," said he, in a mild tone, "you heard my declaration to the men from whom I took you! Answer me with truth, and you shall find that virtue or repentance have alike a refuge in the arms of the Church. As I am its servant no man need fear to confide in me. Speak with candour! How came you by that bugle?"

The stranger looked steadfastly on his questioner: "A minister of the all-righteous God cannot mean to deceive. You have saved my life, and I should be less than man could I doubt the evidence of that deed. I received that bugle from a brave Scot who dwells amongst the eastern mountains, who gave it to me to assure the Earl of Mar that I came from him."

The prior apprehended that it was of Wallace he spoke. "You come to request a military aid from the Earl of Mar," rejoined the father, willing to sound him before he committed Murray, by calling him to the conference.

The stranger replied: "If, reverend sir, you are in the confidence of the good earl, pronounce but the Christian name of the man who charged me with the bugle, and allow

me then, for his sake, to ask you, what has indeed happened to the earl? that I was seized by foes, when I expected to meet with friends only? Reply to this, and I shall speak freely, but at present, though I would confide all of myself to your sacred character, yet the confidence of others is not mine to bestow."

The prior being convinced by this caution that he was indeed speaking with some messenger from Wallace, made no hesitation to answer. "Your master is a knight, and a braver never drew breath, since the time of his royal name-sake, William the Lion."

The man rose hastily from his seat, and falling on his knees before the prior, put his garment to his lips:

"Father, I now know that I am with a friend of my persecuted master! But if, indeed, the situation of Lord Mar precludes assistance from him, all hope is lost! The noble Wallace is penned within the hills, without any hope of escape. Suffer me then to rejoin him immediately, that I may at least die with my friend!"

"Hope for a better destiny," returned the prior; "I am a servant, and not to be worshipped: turn to that altar, and kneel to Him who can alone send the succour you need."

The good man, thinking it was now time to call the young lord of Bothwell, by a side door from the chapter-house, entered the library, where Murray was anxiously awaiting his return. On his entrance, the impatient youth eagerly exclaimed "Have you rescued him?"

"Grimsby, I hope, is far and safely on his journey," answered the good priest; "but the man those murderers were dragging to death is in the chapter-house. Follow me, and he will give you news of Wallace."

Murray gladly obeyed.

At sight of a Scottish knight in armour, the messenger of Wallace thought his prayers were answered, and that he saw before him the leader of the host which was to march to the preservation of his brave commander. Murray told him who he was, and learnt from him in return that Wallace now considered himself in a state of siege; that the women, children, and old men with him had nothing to feed on but wild strawberries and birds' eggs, which they found in the hollow of the rocks. "To relieve them from such hard quarters, girded by a barrier of English soldiers," continued the narrator, "is

his first wish ; but that cannot be effected by our small number. However, he would make the attempt by a stratagem, could we be at all supported by succours from the Earl of Mar ! ”

“ My uncle’s means,” replied Murray, “ are for a time cut off, but mine shall be exerted to the utmost. Did you not meet, somewhere, a company of Scots to the number of fifty ? I sent them off yesterday to seek your noble chief.”

“ No,” rejoined the young man ; “ I fear they have been taken by the enemy ; for on my way to Sir William Wallace, not knowing the English were so close to his sanctuary, I was nearly seized myself. I had not the good fortune to be with him when he struck the first blow for Scotland in the citadel of Lanark, but as soon as I heard the tale of his wrongs, and that he had retired in arms towards the Cartlane Craigs, I determined to follow his fate. We have been companions in our boyish days, and friends after. He saved my life once, and now I seek to repay the debt. For this purpose, a few nights ago I left my guardian’s house by stealth, and sought my way to my friend. I found the banks of the Mouse occupied by the English ; but exploring the most intricate passes, at last gained the bottom of the precipice on the top of which Wallace is encamped ; and as I lay among the bushes, watching an opportunity to ascend, I perceived two English soldiers near me. I overheard them say that, besides Heselrigge himself, nearly two hundred of his garrison had fallen by the hand of Wallace’s men in the contention at the castle : that the tidings were sent to Sir Richard Arnulf, the deputy-governor of Ayr, and he had despatched a thousand men to surround Cartlane Craigs, spies having given notice that they were Sir William’s strongholds, and the orders were that he must be taken dead or alive, while all his adherents, men and women, should receive no quarter. Such was the information I brought to my gallant friend, when in the dead of night I mounted the rock, and calling to the Scottish sentinel in Gaelic, gave him my name, and was allowed to enter that sacred spot. Wallace welcomed his faithful Ker*, and soon unfolded his distress and his hopes. He told me of the famine that threatened his little garrison ; of the constant watching, day and night, necessary to prevent a surprise. In this extremity he observed that one defile was but thinly guarded by the

* The stem of this brave name, in subsequent times, became two great branches, the Roxburghs and the Lothians.

enemy ; probably because, as it lay at the bottom of a perpendicular angle of the rock, they thought it unattainable by the Scots. To this point, however, my dauntless friend turns his eyes. He would attempt it, could he procure a sufficient number of fresh men to cover the retreat of his exhausted few. For this purpose, as I had so lately explored the most hidden paths of the craigs, I volunteered to visit the Lord Mar, and to conduct in safety any succours he might send to our persecuted leader. This," continued Ker, "was the errand on which I came to the earl. Think, then, my horror, when in my journey I found redoubled legions hemming in the hills ; and on advancing towards Bothwell Castle, was seized by a party of English, rifled, and declared an accomplice with that nobleman, who, they said, was condemned to lose his head ! "

"Not so bad as that, my brave Ker," cried Murray, a glow of indignation flushing his cheek ; "many a bull's head* shall frown in this land, on the Southron tables, before my uncle's neck gluts their axes ! No true Scottish blood, I trust, will ever stain their scaffolds ; for while we have arms to wield a sword, he must be a fool that grounds them on any other terms than freedom or death. We have cast our lives on the die, and Wallace's camp or the *narrow house* must be our prize ! "

Murray, turning to Ker, informed him that since he must abandon all hope of hearing any more of the fifty brave men his cousin Helen had sent to the craigs, he bethought him of applying to his uncle Sir John Murray, who dwelt hard by, on his estate at Drumshargard. "It is small," said he, "and cannot afford many men ; but still he may spare sufficient to effect the escape of our commander ; and that for the present will be a host ! "

To accomplish his design without delay—for promptitude is the earnest of success—and to avoid a surprise from the English lieutenant at Bothwell (who, hearing of the rencontre before the castle, might choose to demand his men's prisoner), Murray determined to take Ker with him, and, disguised as peasants, as soon as darkness should shroud their movements proceed to Drumshargard.

* A bull's head presented at a feast, was a sign that some one of the company was immediately to be put to death.

CHAPTER XI.

DRUMSHARGARD.

WHILE these transactions occupied the morning, Lady Helen slept long and sweetly. Her exhausted frame found renovation, and she awoke with a heavenly calm at her heart. A cheering vision had visited her sleeping thoughts, and a trance of happy feelings absorbed her senses, while her hardly disengaged spirit still hovered over its fading images.

She had seen in her dream a young knight enter her cell, bearing her father in his arms. He laid the earl down before her, but as she stooped to embrace him, the knight took her by the hand, and leading her to the window of the apartment (which seemed extended to an immense size), he smiled, and said, "Look out, and see how I have performed my vow!" She obeyed, and saw crowds of rejoicing people, who at sight of the young warrior raised such a shout, that Helen awoke. She started—she looked around—she was still in the narrow cell, and alone; but the rapture of beholding her father yet fluttered in her breast, and the touch of the warrior's hand seemed still warm upon hers. "Angels of rest," cried she, "I thank ye for this blessed vision!"

This dream seemed prophetic. "Yes," cried she, "though thousands of Edward's soldiers surrounded my father and his friend, I should not despair. Thy life, O! noble Wallace, was not given to be extinguished in an hour! Thy morn has hardly risen, the perfect day must come that is to develop thy greatness—that is to prove thee (and oh! gracious God, grant my prayer!) the glory of Scotland!"

Owing to the fervour of her apostrophe, she did not observe the door of the cell open, till the prior stood before her. After expressing his pleasure at the renovation in her countenance, he informed her of the departure of the English soldier, and of the alarm which he and Murray had sustained for his safety, by the adventure which had thrown a stranger from the craigs into their protection. At the mention of that now momentous spot, she blushed; the golden-haired warrior of her dream seemed ready to rise before her; and with a beating heart she prepared to hear some true but miraculous account of her father's rescue.

Unconscious of what was passing in her mind, the prior proceeded to relate all that Ker had told of the extremity to

which Wallace was reduced, and then closed his intelligence by mentioning the attempt which her cousin meditated to save him. The colour gradually faded from the face of Helen, and sighs were her only responses to the observations the good priest made on the difficulty of the enterprise. But when his pity for the brave men engaged in the cause betrayed him into expressing his fears that the patriotic zeal of Wallace would only make him and them a sacrifice, Helen looked up ; there was inspiration on her lips and in her eyes. " Father," said she, " hast thou not taught me that God shieldeth the patriot as well as armeth him ? "

" True ! " returned he, with an answering smile ; " steadily believe this, and where will be the sighs you have just been breathing ? "

" Nature will shrink," replied she, " but the Christian's hope checks her ere she falls. Pardon me then, holy father, that I sometimes weep, but they are often tears of trust and consolation."

" Daughter of heaven," replied the good prior, " you might teach devotion to age, and cause youth to be enamoured of the graces of religion ! Be ever thus and you may look with indifference on the wreck of worlds ! "

Helen having meekly replied to this burst from the heart of the holy man, begged to see her cousin before he set off on his expedition. The prior withdrew, and within an hour after, Murray entered the apartment. Their conversation was long, and their parting full of an interest that dissolved them both into tears. " When I see you again, my brave cousin, tell me that my father is free, and his preserver safe. Your own life, dear Andrew," added she, as he pressed his cheek to hers, " must always be precious to me."

Murray hastily withdrew, and Helen was again alone.

The young chieftain and Ker covered their armour with shepherds' plaids, and having received a thousand blessings from the prior and Halbert, proceeded, under shelter of night, through the obscurest paths of the wood which divided Bothwell from Drumshargard.

Sir John Murray was gone to rest when his nephew arrived, but Lord Andrew's voice being well known by the porter, he was admitted into the house, and, leaving his companion in the dining-hall, went to the apartment of his uncle. The old knight was soon aroused, and welcomed his nephew with open arms, for he had feared, from the accounts brought

by the fugitive tenants of Bothwell, that he also had been carried away prisoner.

Murray now unfolded his errand—first, to obtain a band of Sir John's trustiest people to assist in rescuing the preserver of the earl's life from immediate destruction ; and secondly, if a commission for Lord Mar's release did not arrive from King Edward, to aid him to free his uncle and the countess from Dumbarton Castle.

Sir John listened with growing anxiety to his nephew's details. When he heard of Lady Helen's continuing in the convent, he highly approved it. "That is well," said he ; "to bring her to any private protection would only spread calamity. She might be traced, and her protector put in danger ; none but the church with safety to itself, can grant an asylum to the daughter of a state prisoner."

"Then I doubly rejoice she is there," replied Murray, "and there she will remain till your assistance empowers me to rescue her father."

"Lord Mar has been very rash, nephew," returned Drumsbargard. "What occasion was there for him to volunteer sending men to support Sir William Wallace ? and how durst he bring ruin on Bothwell Castle, by collecting, unauthorised by my brother, its vassals for so dangerous an experiment ? "

Murray started at these unexpected observations. He knew his uncle was timid, but he had never suspected him of meanness ; however, in consideration of the respect he owed to him as his father's brother, he smothered his disgust, and gave him a mild answer. But the old man could not approve of a nobleman of his rank running himself, his fortune, and his friends into peril to pay any debt of gratitude ; and as to patriotic sentiments being a stimulus, he treated the idea with contempt. "Trust me, Andrew," said he, "nobody profits by these notions but thieves, and desperate fellows ready to become thieves ! Who suffers in these *contests for liberty*, as you choose to call them, but such men as Lord Mar and your father ? Who gains by rebellion but a few penniless wretches that embrace these vaunted principles from the urgency of their necessities ! They acquire plunder under the mask of extraordinary disinterestedness, and hazarding nothing of themselves but their worthless lives, they would make tools of the first men in the realm, and throw the whole country into flames, that they may catch a few brands from the fire ! "

Young Murray felt his anger rise with this speech. "You do not speak to my point, sir! I do not come here to dispute the general evil of revolt, but to ask your assistance to snatch two of the bravest men in Scotland from the fangs of the tyrant who has made you a slave!"

"Nephew!" cried the knight, starting from his couch, and darting a fierce look at him, "if any man but one of my own blood had uttered that word this hour should have been his last."

"Every man, sir," continued Murray, "who acts upon your principles must know himself to be a slave—and to resent being called so is to affront his own conscience. A name is nothing; the fact ought to knock upon your heart, and there arouse the indignation of a Scot and a Murray. See you not the villages of your country burning around you? the castles of your chieftains razed to the ground? And yet you exclaim: 'I see no injury—I spurn at the name of slave!'"

Murray rose from his seat as he ended, and walking the room in agitation, did not perceive the confusion of his uncle, who, at once overcome with conviction and fear, again ventured to speak—"It is too sure you speak truth, Andrew; but what am I, or any other private individual, that we should make ourselves a *forlorn hope* for the whole nation? Will Baliol, who was the first to bow to the usurper, will he thank us for losing our heads in resentment of his indignity? For whom, then, should I adventure my grey hairs, and the quiet of my home, to seek an uncertain liberty, and to meet an almost certain death?"

"For Scotland! uncle," replied he; "just laws are her right. You are a Scot, and that is sufficient to arm the enemy against your property and life."

"But I am too insignificant, Andrew!"

"You are the brother of Lord Bothwell!" answered Murray, with all the dignity of his father rising in his countenance. "His large possessions made him a traitor in the eyes of the tyrant's representatives. When they need your wealth, or your lands, your submission is forgotten, and a prison, or the axe, ready to give them quiet possession."

Sir John Murray, though a timid and narrow-sighted man, now fully comprehended his nephew's reasoning; and his fears taking a different turn, he hastily declared his determination to set off immediately for the Highlands. "In the

morning, by daybreak," said he, "I will commence my journey and join my brother at Loch-awe; for I cannot believe myself safe a moment while so near the garrisons of the enemy."

Murray approved this plan; and after obtaining his hard-wrung leave to take thirty men from his vassals, he returned to Ker to inform him of the success of his mission. It was not necessary, neither would it have been agreeable to his pride, to relate the arguments which had been required to obtain this small assistance, and in the course of an hour he brought together the appointed number of the bravest men on the estate. When equipped he led them into the hall to receive the last command from their feudal lord.

On seeing them armed, with every man his drawn dirk in his hand, Sir John turned pale. Murray, with the unfolded banner of Mar in his grasp, and Ker by his side, stood at their head.

"Young men," said the old knight, striving to speak in a firm tone, "in this expedition you are to consider yourselves the followers of my nephew; he is brave and honourable, therefore I commit you to his command. But as you go on his earnest petition, I am not answerable to any man for the enterprises to which he may lead you."

"Be they all on my own head!" cried Murray, blushing at his uncle's pusillanimity, and drawing out his sword with an impatience that made the old knight start. "We now have your permission to depart, sir?"

Sir John gave a ready assent; he was anxious to get so hot-headed a youth out of his house, and to collect his gold and servants that he might commence his own flight by break of day.

CHAPTER XII.

BANKS OF THE CLYDE.

Two days passed drearily away to Helen. She could not expect tidings from her cousin in so short a time.

On the morning of the third day, when she was chiding herself for such rebellious despondence, her female attendant entered to say that a friar was come to conduct her where she would see messengers from Lady Mar. Helen lingered not a moment, but giving her hand to the good father, was led by him into the library, where the prior was standing between

two men in military habits. One wore English armour, with his visor closed; the other, a knight, was in tartans. The Scot presented her with a signet, set in gold. Helen looked on it, and immediately recognised the same that her stepmother always used.

The Scottish knight was preparing to address her when the prior interrupted him, and, taking Lady Helen's hand, made her seat herself. "Compose yourself for a few minutes," said he; "this transitory life hourly brings forward events to teach us to be calm, and to resign our wishes and our wills to the Lord of all things."

Helen looked fearfully in his face. "Some evil tidings are to be told me." The blood left her lips; it seemed leaving her heart also. The prior, full of compassion, hesitated to speak. The Scot abruptly answered her:—

"Be not alarmed, lady, your parents have fallen into humane hands. I am sent, under the command of this noble Southron knight, to conduct you to them."

"Then my father lives! They are safe!" cried she, in a transport of joy, and bursting into tears.

"He yet lives," returned the officer; "but his wounds opening afresh, and the fatigues of his journey, have so exhausted him, that Lord Aymer de Valence has granted the prayers of the countess, and we come to take you to receive his last blessing."

A cry of anguish burst from the heart of Lady Helen, and falling into the arms of the prior, she found refuge from woe in a merciful insensibility. The pitying exertions of the venerable father at last recalled her to recollection and to sorrow. She rose from the bench on which he had laid her, and begged permission to retire for a few minutes; tears choked her further utterance, and, being led out by the friar, she once more re-entered her cell.

Lady Helen passed the moments she had requested in those duties which alone can give comfort to the afflicted, and rising from her knees, with that holy fortitude which none but the devout can know, she took her mantle and veil, and throwing them over her, sent her attendant to the prior to say she was ready to set out on her journey, and wished to receive his parting benediction. The old man sobbed, and the tears of Lady Helen, as he bent upon her hand, dropped upon his silver hair. "May heaven hear you, good Halbert

And cease not, venerable man, to pray for me, for I go into the hour of trial."

"All that dwell in this house, my daughter," rejoined the prior, "shall put up orisons for your comfort, and for the soul of the departing earl." Observing that her grief augmented at these words, he proceeded in a yet more soothing voice: "Regret not that he goes before you, for what is death but entrance into life? It is the narrow gate which shuts us from this dark world to usher us into another of everlasting light and happiness. Weep not, then, dear child of the church, that your earthly parents precede you to the heavenly Father; rather say, with the Virgin Saint Bride, 'How long, O Lord, am I to be banished Thy presence? How long endure the prison of my body before I am admitted to the freedom of paradise, to the bliss of Thy saints above?'"

Helen raised her eyes, yet shining in tears, and with a divine smile pressing the crucifix to her breast, "You do indeed arm me, my father! This is my strength!"

"And one that will never fail thee!" exclaimed he. She dropped upon one knee before him. He crossed his hands over her head—"Go," said he, "and may the angels which guard innocence minister to your sorrows and lead you into peace!"

Helen bowed, and breathing inwardly a devout response, rose and followed the prior out of the cell. At the end of the cloister she again bade farewell to Halbert. Before the great gates stood the knights with their attendants. She once more kissed the crucifix held by the prior, and giving her hand to the Scot, was placed by him on a horse richly caparisoned. He sprung on another himself, while the English officer, who was already mounted, drawing up to her, she pulled down her veil, and all bowing to the holy brotherhood at the porch rode off at a gentle pace.

A sweet breeze played through the valley and revived her harassed frame. She put aside her veil to enjoy its freshness, and saw that the knights turned their horses' heads into one of the obscurest mountain defiles.

When they had been employed for an hour in breaking their way through this trackless glen, they came to a wider space, where other and broader ravines opened before them. The Scot, taking a pass to the right, raised his bugle, and blew so sudden a blast that the horse on which Lady Helen sat took

fright, and began to plunge and rear, to the evident hazard of throwing her into the stream. Some of the dismounted men, seeing her danger, seized the horse by the bridle, while the English knight, extricating her from the saddle, carried her through some clustering bushes into a cave, and laid her at the feet of an armed man.

Terrified at this extraordinary action, she started up with a piercing shriek, but was at that moment enveloped in the arms of the stranger, while a loud shout of exultation resounded from the Scot who stood at the entrance. It was echoed from without. There was horror in every sound. "Blessed Virgin, protect me!" cried she, striving to break from the fierce grasp that held her. "Where am I?" looking wildly at the two men who had brought her: "Why am I not taken to my father?"

She received no answer, and both the Scot and the Englishman left the place. The stranger still held her locked in a grip that seemed of iron. In vain she struggled, in vain she shrieked, in vain she called on earth and heaven for assistance; she was held, and still he kept silence. Exhausted with terror and fruitless attempts for release, she put her hands together, and in a calmer tone exclaimed, "If you have honour or humanity in your heart release me! I am an unprotected woman, praying for your mercy; withhold it not, for the sake of heaven and your own soul!"

"Kneel to me, then, thou siren!" cried the warrior, with fierceness. As he spoke he threw the tender knees of Lady Helen upon the rocky floor. His voice echoed terribly in her ears, but obeying him, "Free me," cried she, "for the sake of my dying father!"

"Never, till I have had my revenge!"

At this dreadful denunciation she shuddered to the soul, but yet she spoke: "Surely I am mistaken for some one else! Oh, how can I have offended any man to incur so cruel an outrage?"

The warrior burst into a satanic laugh, and throwing up his visor, "Behold me, Helen!" cried he, grasping her clasped hands with a horrible force. "My hour is come!"

At the sight of the dreadful face of Soulis, she comprehended all her danger, and with supernatural strength, wresting her hands from his hold, she burst through the bushes out of the cave. Her betrayers stood at the entrance, and catching her in their arms, brought her back to their lord.

But it was an insensible form they now laid before him ; overcome with horror her senses had fled. Short was this suspension from misery ; water was thrown on her face, and she awoke to recollection, lying on the bosom of her enemy. Again she struggled, again her cries echoed from side to side of the cavern. "Peace !" cried the monster, "you cannot escape ; you are now mine for ever ! Twice you refused to be my wife ; you dared to despise my love and my power, now you shall feel my hatred and my revenge !"

"Kill me !" cried the distracted Helen ; "kill me, and I will bless you !"

"That would be a poor vengeance," cried he : "you must be humbled, proud minion, you must learn to fawn on me for a smile ; to woo, as my slave, for one of those caresses you spurned to receive as my wife." As he spoke, he strained her to his breast, with the contending expressions of passion and revenge glaring in his eyes. Helen shrieked at the pollution of his lips ; and as he more fiercely held her, her hand struck against the hilt of his dagger. In a moment she drew it, and armed with the strength of outraged innocence, unwitting whether it gave death or not, only hoping it would release her, she struck it into his side. All was the action of an instant ; while as instantaneously he caught her wrist, and exclaiming, "Damnable traitress !" dashed her from him, stunned and motionless, to the ground.

The weapon had not penetrated far. But the sight of his blood, drawn by the hand of a woman, incensed the raging Soulis. He called aloud on Macgregor. The two men, who yet stood without the cave, re-entered. They started when they saw a dagger in his hand, and Helen, lying apparently lifeless, with blood sprinkled on her garments.

Macgregor, who had personated the Scottish knight, in a tremulous voice, asked why he had killed the lady ?

Soulis frowned : "Here !" cried he, throwing open his vest, "this wound that beautiful fiend you so piteously look upon aimed at my life !"

"My lord," said the other man, who had heard her shrieks, "I expected different treatment for the Earl of Mar's daughter."

"Base Scot !" returned Soulis, "when you brought a woman into these wilds to me, you had no right to expect I should use her otherwise than as I pleased, and you, as the servile minister of my pleasures."

"This language, Lord Soulis!" rejoined the man, much agitated; "but you mistook me—I meant not to reproach."

"'Tis well you did not;" and turning from him with contempt, he listened to Macgregor, who, stooping towards the inanimate Helen, observed that her pulse beat. "Fool!" returned Soulis, "did you think I would so rashly throw away what I have been at such pains to gain? Call your wife; she knows how to teach these minions submission to my will."

The man obeyed; and while his companion, by the command of Soulis, bound a fillet round the bleeding forehead of Helen, cut by the flints, the chief brought two chains, and fastening them to the wrists and ankles, exclaimed, with brutal triumph, while he locked them on, "There, my haughty damsel! flatter not thyself that the arms of Soulis shall be thine only fetters."

Macgregor's wife entered, and promised to obey all her lord's injunctions. When she was left alone with the breathless body of Helen, water, and a few cordial drops, which she poured into the unhappy lady's mouth, soon recalled her wretched senses. On opening her eyes, the sight of one of her own sex inspired her with some hope; but attempting to stretch out her hands in supplication, she was horror-struck at finding them fastened, and at the clink of the chains which bound her. "Why am I thus?" demanded she of the woman; but suddenly recollecting having attempted to pierce Soulis with his own dagger, and now supposing she had slain him, she added, "Is Lord Soulis killed?"

"No" replied the woman; "my husband says he is but slightly hurt; and surely your fair face belies your heart if you could intend the death of so brave and loving a lord!"

"You then belong to him?" cried the wretched Helen, wringing her hands. "What will be my unhappy fate! Virgin of heaven, take me to thyself!"

"Heaven forbid!" cried the woman, "that you should pray against being the favourite lady of our noble chief! Many are the scores around Hermitage Castle who would come hither on their hands and knees to arrive at that happiness."

"Happiness!" cried Lady Helen, in anguish of spirit, "it can visit me no more till I am restored to my father—till I am released from the power of Soulis. Give me liberty," continued she, wildly grasping the arm of the woman. "Assist me to escape, and half the wealth of the Earl of Mar shall be your reward."

"Alas!" returned the woman, "my lord would burn me on the spot, and murder my husband, did he think I even listened to such a project. No, lady; you never will see your father more; for none who so enter my lord's Hermitage ever wish to come out again."

"The Hermitage!" cried Helen, in augmented horror. "Oh, I swear before the throne of Almighty Purity, that Soulis shall see me die rather than dishonoured!"

"Poor young soul!" cried the woman, looking at her with commiseration; "I would pity you if I durst; but I repeat, my life, and my husband's, and my children, who are now near Hermitage, would all be sacrificed to the rage of Lord Soulis. You must be content to submit to his will." Helen closed her hands over her face in mute despair, and the woman went on: "and as for the matter of your making such lamentations about your father, if he be as little your friend as your mother is, you have not much cause to grieve on that score."

Helen started. "My mother! what of her!—Speak! tell me! It was indeed her signet that betrayed me into these horrors. She cannot have consented—Oh, no! some villains!—speak! tell me what you would say of Lady Mar?"

Regardless of the emotion which now shook the frame of her auditor, the woman replied, she had heard from her husband, who was the confidential servant of Lord Soulis, that it was to Lady Mar he owed the knowledge of Helen being at Bothwell. The countess had written a letter to her cousin, Lord Buchan, who, being a sworn friend of England, was then with Lord de Valence at Dumbarton. In this epistle she intimated "her wish that Lord Buchan would devise a plan to surprise Bothwell Castle the ensuing day, to prevent the departure of its armed vassals, then preparing to march to the support of the outlaw Sir William Wallace, who, with his band of robbers, was lurking about the caverns of the Cartlane Craigs."

When this letter arrived, Lord Soulis was at dinner with the other lords; and Buchan, laying it before De Valence, they all consulted what was best to be done. Lady Mar begged her cousin not to appear in the affair himself, that she might escape the suspicions of her lord; who, she strongly declared, was not arming his vassals for any disloyal disposition towards the king of England, but solely at the instigations of Wallace, to whom he romantically considered himself bound by the

ties of gratitude. As she gave this information, she hoped that no attainder would fall upon her husband. And to keep the transaction as close as possible, she proposed that the Lord Soulis, who she understood was then at Dumbarton, should take the command of two or three thousand troops, and marching to Bothwell next morning, seize the few hundred armed Scots who were there ready to proceed to the mountains. She ended by saying that her daughter-in-law was in the castle, which she hoped would be an inducement to Soulis to ensure the Earl of Mar's safety for the sake of her hand as his reward.

The greatest part of Lady Mar's injunctions could not be attended to, as Lord de Valence, as well as Soulis, was made privy to the secret. The English nobleman declared that he should not do his duty to his king if he did not head the force that went to quell so dangerous a conspiracy; and Soulis, eager to go at any rate, joyfully accepted the honour of being his companion. Lord Buchan was easily persuaded to the seizure of the earl's person, as De Valence flattered him that the king would endow him with the Mar estates, which must now be confiscated. Helen groaned at the latter part of this narration; but the woman, without noticing it, proceeded to relate how, when the party had executed their design at Bothwell Castle, she was to have been taken by Soulis to his castle near Glasgow; but, on that wily Scot not finding her, he conceived the suspicion that Lord de Valence had prevailed on the countess to give her up to him. He observed, that the woman who could be induced to betray her daughter to one man would easily be bribed to repeat the crime to another, and, under this impression, he accused the English nobleman of treachery. De Valence denied it vehemently; a quarrel ensued, and Soulis departed with a few of his followers, giving out that he was retiring to Dunglass. But the fact was, he lurked about in Bothwell wood, and from its recesses saw Cressingham's lieutenant march by to take possession of the castle in the king's name. A deserter from this troop fell in with Lord Soulis's company, and flying to him for protection, a long private conversation took place between them. At this period one of the spies who had been left by that chief in quest of news, returned with a female tenant of St. Fillan's, whom he had seduced from her home. She told Lord Soulis all he wanted to know; informing him that a

beautiful young lady, who could be no other than Lady Helen Mar, was concealed in that convent.

On this information he conversed a long time with the stranger from Cressingham's detachment. And determining on carrying off Helen immediately to Hermitage, that the distance of Teviotdale might render a rescue less probable, he laid his plan accordingly. "In consequence," continued the woman, "my husband and the stranger, the one habited as a Scottish and the other as an English knight (for my lord being ever on some wild prank, has always a chest of strange dresses with him), set out for St. Fillan's, taking with them the signet which your mother had sent with her letter to the earl her cousin. They hoped such a pledge of their truth would ensure them credit. You know the tale they invented; and its success proves my lord to be no bad contriver."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE PENTLAND HILLS.

HELEN listened with astonishment and grief to this story of her stepmother's ill-judged tenderness or cruel treachery; and remembering the threats which had escaped that lady in their last conversation, she saw no reason to doubt what so clearly explained the before inexplicable seizure of her father, the betraying of Wallace, and her own present calamity.

"You do not answer me," rejoined the woman; "but if you think I don't say true, Lord Soulis himself will assure you of the fact."

"Alas, no!" returned Helen, profoundly sighing, "I believe it too well. I see the depth of the misery into which I am plunged. And yet," cried she, recollecting the imposition the men had put upon her; "yet, I shall not be wholly so if my father lives, and was not in the extremity they told me of!"

"If that thought gives you comfort, retain it," returned the woman: "the whole story of the earl's illness was an invention to bring you at so short notice from the protection of the prior."

"I thank thee, gracious Providence, for this comfort!" exclaimed Helen: "it inspires me with redoubled trust in thee."

Margery shook her head. "Ah, poor victim (thought she), how vain is thy devotion!" But she had not time to say so,

for her husband and the deserter from Cressingham re-entered the cave. Helen, afraid that it was Soulis, started up. The stranger proceeded to lift her in his arms ; she struggled, and in the violence of her action struck his beaver : it opened, and discovered a pale and stern countenance, with a large scar across his jaw ; this mark of contest, and the gloomy scowl of his eyes, made Helen rush towards the woman for protection. The man hastily closed his helmet, and speaking through the clasped steel, for the first time she heard his voice, which sounded hollow and decisive, he bade her prepare to accompany Lord Soulis in a journey to the south.

Helen looked at her shackled arms, and despairing of effecting her escape by any effort of her own, she thought that gaining time might be some advantage ; and allowing the man to take her hand, while Macgregor supported her on the other side, they led her out of the cave. She observed the latter smile significantly at his wife. " Oh ! " cried she, " to what am I betrayed ! Unhand me—leave me ! " Almost fainting with dread, she leaned against the arm of the stranger.

Thunder now pealed over her head, and lightning shot across the mountains. She looked up : " Merciful heaven ! " cried she, in a voice of deep horror, " send down thy bolt on me ! " At that moment Soulis, mounted on his steed, approached, and ordered her to be put into the litter. Incapable of contending with the numbers which surrounded her, she allowed them to execute their master's commands. Macgregor's wife was set on a pillion behind him ; and Soulis giving the word, they all marched on at a rapid pace. In a few hours, having cleared the shady valleys of the Clyde, they entered the long and barren tracts of the Leadhill Moors.

" All is desolation, like myself ! " thought Helen ; but neither the cold wind nor the rain now drifting into her vehicle occasioned her any sensation.

The cavalcade with difficulty mounted the steep of a mountainous hill, where the storm raged so turbulently, that the men who carried the litter stopped, and told their lord it would be impossible to proceed in the approaching darkness : they conjured him to look at the perpendicular rocks, rendered indistinct by the gathering mist ; to observe the overwhelming gusts of the tempest, and then judge whether they dare venture with the litter on so dangerous a pathway, made slippery by the descending rain !

To halt in such a spot seemed to Soulis as unsafe as to proceed. "We shall not be better off," answered he, "should we attempt to return; precipices lie on either side, and to stand still would be equally perilous; the torrents from the heights increase so rapidly, there is every chance of our being swept away should we remain exposed to their stream."

Helen looked at these sublime cascades with a calm welcome as they poured from the hills, and flung their spray upon the roof of her vehicle. She hailed her release in the death they menaced; and far from being intimidated at the prospect, cast a resigned, and even wistful glance, into the swelling lake beneath, under whose waves she expected soon to sleep.

On the remonstrance of their master, the men resumed their pace: and after a hard contention with the storm, they gained the summit of the west side of the mountains, and were descending its eastern brow when the shades of night closed in upon them. Looking down into the black chaos, on the brink of which they must pass along, they once more protested they could not advance a foot until the dawn should give them some security.

At this declaration, which Soulis saw could not now be disputed, he ordered the troop to halt under the shelter of a projecting rock. Its huge arch overhung the ledge that formed the road, while the deep gulf at his feet, by the roaring of its waters, proclaimed itself the receptacle of those cataracts which rush tremendous from the ever-streaming Pentland Hills.

Soulis dismounted. The men set down the litter, and removed to a distance as he approached. He opened one of the curtains, and throwing himself beside the exhausted, but watchful Helen, clasped his arms roughly about her, and exclaimed, "Sweet minion, I must pillow on your bosom till the morn awakes!" His brutal lips were again rivetted to her cheek. Ten thousand strengths seemed then to heave him from her heart, and struggling with a power that amazed even herself, she threw him from her, and holding him off with her shackled arms, her shrieks again pierced the heavens.

"Scream thy soul away, poor fool!" exclaimed Soulis, seizing her fiercely in his arms; "for thou art now so surely mine, that heaven itself cannot deprive me!"

At that moment her couch was shaken by a sudden shock,

and in the next she was covered with the blood of Soulis. A stroke from an unseen arm had reached him, and starting on his feet, a fearful battle of swords took place over the prostrate Helen.

One of the men, out of the numbers who hastened to the assistance of their master, fell dead on her body ; while the chief himself, sorely wounded, and breathing revenge and blasphemy, was forced off by the survivors. " Where do you carry me, villains ? " cried he. " Separate me not from the vengeance I will yet hurl on that demon who has robbed me of my victim, or ye shall die a death more horrible than hell can inflict ! " He raved ; but more unheeded than the tempest. Terrified that the spirits of darkness were indeed their pursuers, in spite of his reiterated threats, the men carried him to a distant hollow in the rock, and laid him down, now insensible from loss of blood. One or two of the most desperate returned to see what was become of Lady Helen, well aware that if they could regain her their master would be satisfied ; but, should she be lost, the whole troop knew their fate would be some merciless punishment.

Macgregor and the deserter of Cressingham were the first who reached the spot where the lady had been left : with horror they found the litter, but not herself. She was gone. But whether carried off by the mysterious arm which had felled their lord, or she had thrown herself into the foaming gulf beneath, they could not determine. They decided, however, the latter should be their report to Soulis, knowing that he would rather believe the object of his passions had perished than that she had escaped his toils.

Almost stupefied with consternation, they returned to report this tale to their furious lord, who, on having his wounds stanchd, had recovered from his swoon. On hearing that the beautiful creature he had so lately believed his own beyond the power of fate ; that *his property*, as he called her, the devoted slave of his will, the mistress of his destiny, was lost to him for ever ! swallowed up in the whelming wave ! he became frantic. There was desperation in every word. He raved—tore up the earth like a wild beast, and, foaming at the mouth, dashed the wife of Macgregor from him, as she approached with a fresh balsam for his wounds. " Off, scum of a damned sex ! " cried he. " Where is she whom I entrusted to thy care ? "

"My lord," answered the affrighted woman, "you know best. You terrified the poor young creature. You forced yourself into a litter, and can you wonder——"

"That I should force you to perdition, execrable wretch!" cried he, "that knew no better how to prepare a slave to receive her lord!" As he spoke, he struck her again; but it was with his gauntlet hand, and the eyes of the unfortunate woman opened no more. The blow fell on her temple, and a motionless corpse lay before him.

"My wife!" cried the poor Macgregor, putting his trembling arms about her neck: "Oh, my lord, how have I deserved this? You have slain her!"

"Suppose I have!" returned the chief with a cold scorn; "she was old and ugly; and could you recover Helen you should cull Hermitage for a substitute for this prating beldam."

Macgregor made no reply, but feeling in his heart that he "who sows the wind must reap the whirlwind"—that such were the rewards from villainy to its vile instruments—he could not but say to himself, "I have deserved it of my God, but not of thee!" and sobbing over the remains of his equally criminal wife, by the assistance of his comrades he removed her from the now hated presence of his lord.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE HUT.

MEANWHILE, the Lady Helen, hardly rational from the horror and hope that agitated her, extricated herself from the dead body: and in her eagerness to escape would certainly have fallen over the precipice, had not the same gallant arm which had covered her persecutor with wounds caught her as she sprang from the litter. "Fear not, lady," exclaimed a gentle voice; "you are under the protection of a Scottish knight."

He directed the men to take their axes, and cut away on their side of the fall, the tree which arched it. It was probable the villain he had just assailed, or his followers, might pursue him, and he thought it prudent to demolish the bridge.

The men obeyed, and the warrior returned to his fair charge. It was raining fast; and fearful of farther exposing her to the inclemencies of the night, he proposed leading her to shelter.

“There is a hermit’s cell on the northern side of this mountain. I will conduct you thither in the morning, as to the securest asylum ; but meanwhile we must seek a nearer refuge.”

“Anywhere, sir, with honour my guide,” answered Helen timidly.

“You are safe with me,” returned he. “I am a man who can now have no joy in womankind, but when as a brother I protect them. Whoever you are, confide in me and you shall not be betrayed.”

Helen confidently gave him her hand, and strove to rise, but at the first attempt, the shackles piercing her ankles, she sunk again on the ground. The cold iron on her wrists touched the hand of her preserver. He now recollected his surprise on hearing the clank of chains when carrying her over the bridge : “Who,” inquired he, “could have done this unmanly deed ?”

“The wretch from whom you rescued me—to prevent my escape from a captivity worse than death.”

While she spoke, he wrenched open the manacles from her wrists and ankles, and threw them over the precipice. As she heard them dash into the torrent, an unutterable gratitude filled her heart ; and again giving her hand to him to lead her forward, she said with earnestness, “O, sir, if you have a wife or sister—should they ever fall into the like peril with mine, may heaven reward your bravery by sending them such a preserver !”

The stranger sighed deeply. “Sweet lady,” returned he, “I have no sister, no wife. But my kindred is nevertheless very numerous, and I thank thee for thy prayer.” The hero sighed profoundly again, and led her silently down the windings of the declivity. Having proceeded with caution, they descended into a little wooded dell, and soon approached the half-standing remains of what had once been a shepherd’s hut. “This,” said the knight, as they entered, “was the habitation of a good old man, who fed his flock on these mountains ; but a band of Southron soldiers forced his only daughter from him, and, plundering his little abode, drove him out upon the waste. He perished the same night by grief and the inclemencies of the weather. His son, a brave youth, was left for dead by his sister’s ravishers, but I found him in this dreary solitude, and he told me the too general story of his wounds and his despair. Indeed, lady, when I heard your shrieks from the

opposite side of the chasm, I thought they might proceed from this poor boy's sister, and I flew to restore them to each other."

Helen shuddered, as he related a tale so nearly resembling her own; and trembling with weakness, and horror of what might have been her fate had she not been rescued by this gallant stranger, she sunk exhausted upon a turf seat. The chief still held her hand. It was very cold, and he called to his men to seek fuel to make a fire. While his messengers were exploring the crannies of the rocks for dried leaves and sticks, Helen, totally overcome, leaned almost motionless against the wall of the hut.

"Poor lady!" said he, "she will perish in these forlorn regions, where neither warmth nor nourishment can be found."

To his glad welcome, several of his men soon after entered with a quantity of withered boughs, which they had found in the fissures of the rock at some distance. With these a fire was speedily kindled: and its blaze diffusing comfort through the chamber, he had the satisfaction of hearing a sigh from the breast of his charge. Her head still leaned on his bosom, when she opened her eyes. The light shone full on her face.

"Lady," said he, "I bless God you are revived!" Her delicacy shrunk at the situation in which she found herself, and raising herself, though feebly, she thanked him, and requested a little water. Her face was pale as marble, and her long hair, saturated with wet, by its darkness made her look of a more deadly hue.

"Death! how lovely caust thou be!" sighed the knight to himself—he even groaned. Helen started, and looked around her, with alarm. "Fear not," said he, "I only dreaded your pale looks: but you revive, and will yet bless all that are dear to you. Suffer me, to drain the dangerous wet from these tresses?" He took hold of them as he spoke. She saw the water running from her hair over his hands, and allowing his request, he continued wiping her locks with his scarf, till, exhausted by fatigue, she gradually sunk into a profound sleep.

Dawn had penetrated the ruined walls of the hut before Lady Helen awoke. But when she did, she was refreshed; and opening her eyes—hardly conscious where she was, or whether all that floated in her memory were not the departing vapours of a frightful dream—she turned her head and fixed them upon the figure of the knight, who was seated near

her. His noble air, and the pensive expression of his fine features, struck like a spell upon her gathering recollections ; she at once remembered all she had suffered, all that she owed to him. She moved. Her preserver turned his eyes towards her : seeing she was awake, he rose from the side of the dying embers he had sedulously kept alive during her slumber, and expressed his hopes that she felt restored. She returned him a grateful reply in the affirmative ; and he quitted her to rouse his men for their journey to the hermit's cell.

When he re-entered he found Helen braiding up the fine hair which had so lately been scattered by the elements. She would have risen at his approach, but he seated himself on a stone at her feet. " We shall be detained here a few minutes longer," said he : " I have ordered my men to make a litter of crossed branches, to bear you on their shoulders. Your delicate limbs would not be equal to the toil of descending these heights to the glen of stones. The venerable man who inhabits there will protect you until he can summon your family, or friends, to receive his charge."

At these words, which Helen thought were meant to reprove her for not having revealed herself, she blushed ; but fearful of breathing a name under the interdict of the English governors, and which had already spread devastation over all with whom it had been connected, she paused for a moment ; and then, with colour heightening, replied : " For your humanity, shown this night to a friendless woman, I must be ever grateful ; but not even to the hermit may I reveal my name. It is fraught with danger to every honest Scot who should know that he protects one who bears it ; and therefore, least of all, noble stranger, would I breathe it to you." She averted her face to conceal the emotions she could not subdue.

The knight looked at her intensely, and profoundly sighed. Half her locks lay upon her bosom, which now heaved with suppressed feelings, and fast-falling tears dropped upon his hand ; he sighed again, and tore his eyes from her countenance. " I ask not, madam, to know what you think proper to conceal, but danger has no alarms for me, when, by incurring it, I serve those who need a protector."

A sudden thought flashed across her mind : might it not be possible that this tender guardian of her safety, this heroic profferer of service, was the noble Wallace ? But the vain idea fled. He was pent up amidst the beleaguered defiles of

Cartlane Craigs, sworn to extricate the helpless families of his followers, or to perish with them. This knight was accompanied by none but men, and his kind eyes shone in too serene a lustre to be the mirrors of the disturbed soul of the chief of Elderslie. "Ah, then," murmured she to herself, "are there two men in Scotland who will speak thus?" She looked up in his face. The plumes of his bonnet shaded his features, but she saw they were paler than on his entrance, and a strange expression of distraction agitated their before composed lines. His eyes were bent to the ground as he proceeded—

"I am the servant of my fellow-creatures—command me and my faithful followers, and if it be in the power of such small means to succour you or yours I am ready to answer for their obedience. If the villain from whom I had the happiness to release you be yet more deeply implicated in your sorrows tell me how they can be relieved, and I will attempt it. I shall make no new enemies by the deed, for the Southrons and I are at eternal enmity."

"Alas!" replied she, "ill should I repay such nobleness were I to involve it in the calamities of my house. No, generous stranger, I must remain unknown. Leave me with the hermit, and from his cell I will send to some relation to take me thence."

"I urge you no more," replied the knight, rising; "were I at the head of an army, instead of a handful of men, I might then have a better argument for offering my services; but as it is I feel my weakness, and seek to know no further."

Helen trembled with unaccountable emotion. "Were you at the head of an army I might then dare to reveal the full weight of my anxieties; but heaven has already been sufficiently gracious to me by your hands in redeeming me from my cruellest enemy; and for the rest I put my trust in the same over-ruling Providence." At this moment a man entered, and told the knight the vehicle was finished, the morning fine, and his men ready to march. He turned toward Helen: "May I conduct you to the rude carriage we have prepared!"

Helen gathered her mantle about her; and the knight, throwing his scarf over her head—it had no other covering—she gave him her hand, and he led her out of the hut to the side of the bier. It was overlaid with the men's plaids. The knight placed her on it, and the carriers raising it on their shoulders, her deliverer led the way, and they took their course down the mountain.

CHAPTER XV.

THE GLEN OF STONES.

THEY proceeded in silence through the curving dell till it opened into a hazardous path along the top of a cliff which overhung and clasped in the western side of a deep loch. All nature seemed to rejoice at the presence of this magnificent emblem of the Most High. Helen's heart swelled with devotion.

"Such," thought she, "O sun, art thou! The resplendent image of the Giver of all Good. Thy cheering beams, like His all-cheering Spirit, pervade the soul, and drive thence the despondency of cold and darkness. But bright as thou art, how does the similitude fade before godlike man, the true image of his Maker."

As they advanced the vale gradually narrowed, and at last shut them within an immense chasm, which seemed to have been cleft at its towering summit to admit a few beams of light to the desert below. The men who carried Helen with some difficulty found a safe footing. However, after unremitted caution, they extricated themselves from the intricate path, and more lightly followed their chief into a less gloomy part of this chaos of nature. The knight stopped, and told Helen they had arrived at the end of their journey.

"In the heart of that cliff," said he, "is the hermit's cell; a desolate shelter, but a safe one. Old age and poverty hold no temptation to the enemies of Scotland."

As he spoke, the venerable man, who had heard voices beneath, appeared on the rock; and while his majestic figure, clad in grey, moved forward, and his silver beard flowed from his saintly countenance, he seemed the bard of Morven, issuing from his cave of shells to bid a hero's welcome to the young and warlike Oscar.

"Bless thee, my son," cried he, as he descended; "what good or evil accident hath returned thee so soon to these solitudes?"

The knight briefly related the circumstances of Helen's rescue, and that he had brought her to share his asylum. The hermit took her by the hand, and graciously promised her every service in his power.

"Here, daughter," said he, "has one son of persecuted Scotland found a refuge. There is naught, alluring in these

wilds to attract the spoiler. The green herb is all the food they afford, and the limpid water their best beverage."

"Ah!" returned Helen, with grateful animation, "would to heaven that all who love the freedom of Scotland were now within this glen!"

"Ah!" said the hermit, "I do not wonder that you speak in terms which tell me even your tender sex feels the tyranny of Edward. Who in Scotland is exempt? The whole country groans beneath his oppressions, and the cruelty of his agents makes its rivulets run with blood. Six months ago I was abbot of Scone. Because I refused to betray my trust, and resign the archives of the kingdom lodged there, Edward, the rebel-anointed of the Lord! the profaner of the sanctuary! sent his emissaries to sack the convent, to tear the holy pillar of Jacob from its shrine, and to wrest from my grasp the records I refused to deliver. All was done as the usurper commanded. Most of my brethren were slain. Myself and the remainder were turned out upon the waste. We retired to the monastery of Cambuskenneth; but there oppression found us. Cressingham, having seized on other religious houses, determined to swell his hoards with the plunder of that also. In the dead of night the attack was made. My brethren fled; I knew not whither to go; but, I took my course over the hills, and finding the valley of stones fit for my purpose, for two months have lived alone in this wilderness."

"Unhappy Scotland!" ejaculated Helen. Her eyes had followed the chief, who during this narrative leaned thoughtfully against the entrance of the cave. Her eyes were cast upwards with an expression that made her heart utter the exclamation which had escaped her. The knight turned and approached her: "You hear from the lips of my venerable friend," said he, "a direful story; happy then am I, gentle lady, that you and he have found a refuge, though a rough one. I must now tear myself from this tranquillity to seek scenes more befitting a younger son of the country he deploras."

Helen felt unable to answer. But the abbot spoke: "And am I not to see you again?"

"That is as heaven wills," replied he; "but as it is unlikely on this side the grave, my best pledge of friendship is this lady. To you she may reveal what she has withheld from me; but, in either case, she is secure in your goodness."

"Rely on my faith, my son; and may the Almighty's shield hang on your steps!"

The knight turned to Helen: "Farewell!" said he. She trembled at the word, and, hardly conscious of what she did, held out her hand to him. He took it, and drew it towards his lips, but checking himself, he only pressed it, while in a mournful voice he added, "In your prayer sometimes remember the most desolate of men!"

A mist seemed to pass over the eyes of Lady Helen. She felt as if on the point of losing something most precious: "My prayers for my own preserver, and for my father's," cried she, in an agitated voice, "shall ever be mingled. And if ever it be safe to remember me—should heaven indeed *arm the patriot's hand*, then my father may be proud to know and to thank the brave deliverer of his child."

The knight paused, and looked with animation upon her: "Then your father is in arms, and against the tyrant! Tell me where, and you see before you a man who is ready to join him, and to lay down his life in the just cause!"

"My father," replied Helen, weeping afresh, "is not where your generous services can reach him. Two brave chiefs, one a kinsman of my own, and the other his friend, are now colleague'd to free him. If they fail, my whole house falls in blood! and to add another victim to the destiny which in that case will overwhelm me—the thought is beyond my strength." Faint with agitation, and the horrible images which reawakened her direst fears, she stopped, and then added in a suppressed voice, "Farewell!"

"Not till you hear me further," replied he. "I repeat, I have now a scanty number of followers, but I leave these mountains to gather more. Tell me, then, where I may join these chiefs you speak of. Give me a pledge that I come from you, and whoever may be your father, as he is a true Scot, I will compass his release, or perish in the attempt."

"Alas! generous stranger," cried she, "to what would you persuade me? You know not the peril that you ask!"

"Nothing is perilous to me," replied he, with an heroic smile, "that is to serve my country. I have no interest, no joy, but in her. Give me, then, the only happiness of which I am now capable, and send me to serve her by freeing one of her defenders!"

Helen hesitated. The tumult of her mind dried her tears.

She looked up with all these inward agitations painted on her cheeks. His eyes were full of patriotic ardour, and his countenance, composed by the sublime sentiments which occupied his soul, made him appear to her not as a man, but as an angel from the host of heaven.

"Fear not, lady," said the hermit, "that you would plunge your deliverer into any extraordinary danger by involving him in what you might call rebellion against the usurper. He is already a proscribed——"

"Proscribed!" repeated she; "wretched indeed is my country when her noblest spirits are denied the right to live!—when every step they take to regain what has been torn from them only involves them in deeper ruin."

"No country is wretched, sweet lady," returned the knight, "till by a dastardly acquiescence, it consents to its own slavery. Bonds and death are the utmost of our enemy's malice; the one is beyond his power to inflict when a man is determined to die or to live free; and for the other, which of us will think that ruin which leads to the freedom of paradise?"

Helen looked on the chief as she used to look on her cousin when expressions of virtuous enthusiasm burst from his lips, but now it was rather with the gaze of admiring awe than the exultation of one youthful mind sympathising with another. "You would teach confidence to despair herself," returned she; "again I hope, for God does not create in vain! Go, then, to the Cartlane Craigs. But, alas! how can I direct you?" cried she. "The passes are beset with English, and I know not whether at this moment the brave Wallace survives, to be again the deliverer of my father!"

Helen paused. The recollection of all that Wallace had suffered for the sake of her father, and of the mortal extremity in which Ker had left him, rose like a dreadful train of apparitions before her. Horror overspread her countenance; and lost in these remembrances, she did not remark the rushing colour of the knight as she pronounced the name of Wallace.

"If Wallace ever had the happiness of serving any who belonged to you," returned the knight, "he has at least one source of pleasure in that remembrance. Tell me what he can further do? Only say, where is that father whom you say he once preserved, and I will hasten to yield my feeble aid to repeat the service!"

"Alas!" replied Helen, "I cannot but repeat my fears that the bravest of men no longer exists. Two days before I was betrayed into the hands of the traitor from whom you rescued me, a messenger from Cartlane Craigs informed my cousin that the gallant Wallace was surrounded, and if my father did not send forces to relieve him he must inevitably perish. No forces could my father send; he was then made a prisoner by the English, his retainers shared the same fate, and none but my cousin escaped to accompany the honest Scot back to his master. My cousin set forth with a few followers to join him—a few against thousands."

"They are in arms for their country, lady," returned the knight, "and a thousand invisible angels guard them; fear not for them. But for your father, name to me the place of his confinement, and as I have not the besiegers of Cartlane Craigs to encounter, I engage, with God's help, and the arms of my men (who never yet shrunk from sword or spear), to set the brave earl free!"

"How!" exclaimed Helen, remembering that she had not yet mentioned her father's rank, and gazing at him with astonishment; "Do you know his name—is the misfortune of my father already so far spread?"

"Rather say his virtue," answered the knight; "no man who watches over the destiny of our devoted country can be ignorant of her friends, or of the sufferers who bear injury for her sake. I know that the Earl of Mar has made himself a generous sacrifice, but I am yet to learn the circumstances from you. Speak without reserve, that I may seek the accomplishment of my vow, and restore to Scotland its best friend!"

"Thou brother in heart to the generous Wallace!" exclaimed Lady Helen, "my voice is feeble to thank thee." The hermit, who had listened in silent interest, now, fearing the consequence of so much emotion, presented her with a cup of water and a little fruit, to refresh herself, before she satisfied the inquiries of the knight. She put the cup to her lips, to gratify the benevolence of her host, but her spirit was too much occupied in the concerns dearest to her heart to feel any wants of the body; and turning to the knight she briefly related what had been the design of her father with regard to Sir William Wallace; how he had been seized at Bothwell and sent with his family a prisoner to Dumbarton Castle.

"Proceed then thither," continued she. "If heaven have

yet spared the lives of Wallace and my cousin Andrew Murray, you will meet them before its walls. Meanwhile I shall seek the protection of my father's sister, and in her castle near the Forth abide in safety. But, noble stranger, one bond I must lay upon you : should you come up with my cousin, do not discover that you have met with me. He is precipitate in his resentment ; and his hatred is so hot against Soulis, my betrayer, that should he know the outrage I have sustained he would, I fear, run himself and the general cause into danger by seeking an immediate revenge."

The stranger readily passed his word to Helen that he would never mention her name to any of her family until she herself should give him leave. "But when your father is restored to his rights," continued he, "in his presence, I hope to claim my acquaintance with his admirable daughter."

Helen blushed at this compliment ;—it was not more than any man in his situation might have said, but it confused her, and hardly knowing what were her thoughts, she answered— "His personal freedom may be effected ! and God grant such a reward to your prowess ! But his other rights, what can recover them ? His estates sequestrated, his vassals in bonds, all power of the Earl of Mar will be annihilated, and from some obscure refuge like this must he utter his thanks to his daughter's preserver."

"Not so," replied he ; "the sword is now raised in Scotland that cannot be laid down till it be broken or have conquered."

"So I felt," returned Helen, "while I had not yet seen the horrors of the contest. While my father commanded in Bothwell Castle, and was sending out auxiliaries to the patriot chief, I, too, felt nothing but the inspiration which led them on, and saw nothing but the victory which must crown so just a cause. But now, when all whom my father commanded are slain or carried away by the enemy ; when he is himself a prisoner, and awaiting the sentence of the tyrant he opposed ; when the gallant Wallace, instead of being able to hasten to his rescue, is besieged by a numberless host, hope almost dies within me, and I fear that whoever may be fated to free Scotland, my beloved father, and those belonging to him, are first to be made a sacrifice."

She turned pale as she spoke, and the stranger resumed. "No, lady, if there be that virtue in Scotland which can alone deserve freedom, it will be achieved. I am an inconsiderable

man, but relying on the God of Justice, I promise you your father's liberty ! and let his freedom be a pledge to you for that of your country. I now go to rouse a few brave spirits to arms. Remember, the battle is not to the strong, nor victory with a multitude of hosts ! The banner* of Saint Andrew was once held from the heavens, over a little band of Scots, while they discomfited a thousand enemies—the same arm leads me on ; and if need be, I despair not to see it again, like the flaming pillar before the Israelites, consuming the enemies of liberty, even in the fullness of their might."

While he yet spoke, the hermit re-entered from the inner cell, supporting a youth on his arm. At sight of the knight who held out his hand to him, he dropped on his knees and burst into tears. "Do you then leave me ?" cried he, "am I not to serve my preserver ?"

Helen rose in strange surprise ; there was something in the feelings of the boy that was infectious ; and while her own heart beat violently, she looked first on his emaciated figure and then at the noble contour of the knight. His beaming eyes appeared the very fountains of consolation, his cheek was bright with generous emotions, and turning from the suppliant boy to Helen, "Rise," said he to the youth, "and behold in this lady the object of the service to which I appoint you. You will soon, I hope, be sufficiently recovered to attend upon her wishes as you would upon mine. Be her servant and her guard ; and when we meet again, as she will then be under the protection of her father, if you do not prefer so gentle a service before the rougher one of war, I will resume you to myself."

The youth who had obeyed the knight and risen, bowed respectfully ; and Helen, uttering some incoherent words of thanks to hide her agitation, turned away. The hermit exclaimed, "Again, my son, I beseech heaven to bless thee !"

"And may its guardian care shield all here !" replied the knight. Helen looked up to bid him a last farewell—but he was gone. The hermit had left the cell with him, and the youth also had disappeared into the inner cave. Being left alone

* At a time when Achais, King of Scots, and Hungus, King of the Picts, were fiercely driven by Athelstan, King of Northumberland, into East Lothian, full of terrors of what the next morning might bring forth, Hungus fell into a sleep, and beheld a vision, which tradition tells, was verified the ensuing day by the appearance of the Cross of St. Andrew held out to him from the heavens, and waving him to victory. Under this banner he conquered the Northumberland forces ; and, slaying their leader, the scene of the battle has henceforth been called *Athelstanford*.

she threw herself down before the altar, and giving way to tears, inwardly implored protection for that brave knight's life, and by his means to grant safety to Wallace and freedom to her father.

As she prayed, her emotion subsided ; and a holy confidence elevating her mind, she remained in an ecstasy of hope, till a solemn voice from behind her called her from this happy trance.

"Blessed are they which put their trust in God !"

She calmly rose, and perceived the hermit, who, on entering, had observed her devout position, and the spontaneous benediction broke from his lips. "Daughter," said he, leading her to a seat, "this hero will prevail ; for the Power before whose altar you have just knelt has declared, 'My might is with them who obey My laws, and put their trust in Me !' You speak highly of the young and valiant Sir William Wallace, but I cannot conceive that he can be better formed for great and heroic deeds than this chief. Suppose them, then, to be equal ; when they have met, with two such leaders, what may not a few determined Scots perform ?"

Helen sympathised with the cheering prognostications of the hermit, and wishing to learn the name of this rival of character she had regarded as unparalleled, she asked by what title she must call the knight who had undertaken so hazardous an enterprise for her.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE HERMIT'S CELL.

"I KNOW not," returned the hermit ; "I never saw your gallant deliverer before yesterday morning. Broken from my matins by a sudden noise, I beheld a deer rush down the precipice, and fall headlong. As he lay struggling amongst the stones at the entrance of my cave, I had just observed an arrow in his side, when a shout issued from the rocks above, and looking up, I beheld a young chieftain, with a bow in his hand, leaping from cliff to cliff, till springing from a high projection on the right, he lit at once at the head of the wounded deer.

"I emerged from the recess that concealed me, and addressed him. His followers immediately appeared, and with a stroke slew the animal. The chief left them to dress it for their own refreshment, and, on my invitation, entered the cell to share a hermit's fare,

“I told him who I was, and what had driven me to this seclusion. In return, he informed me of a design he had conceived to stimulate the surrounding chiefs to some exertions for their country, but as he never mentioned his name, I concluded he wished it to remain unrevealed, and therefore I forbore to inquire it. I imparted to him my doubts of the possibility of any single individual being able to arouse the slumbering courage of our country, but his language soon filled me with other thoughts. The arguments he used were these—The perfidy of King Edward, who, deemed a prince of high honour, had been chosen umpire in the cause of Bruce and Baliol. He accepted the task, in the character of a friend of our kingdom; but no sooner was he advanced into the heart of our kingdom, and at the head of the large army he had treacherously introduced as a mere appendage of state, than he declared the act of judgment was his right as liege lord of the realm? This falsehood, which our records disproved at the outset, was not his only baseness; he bought the conscience of Baliol, and adjudged to him the throne. The recreant prince acknowledged him his master, and in that degrading ceremony of homage he was followed by almost all the lowland Scottish lords. But this vile yielding did not purchase peace; Edward demanded oppressive services from the king, and the castles of the nobility to be resigned to English governors. These requisitions being remonstrated against by a few of our boldest chiefs, the tyrant repeated them with additional demands, and prepared to resent the appeal on the whole nation.

“Three months have hardly elapsed since the fatal battle of Dunbar, where, indignant at the outrages committed on their monarch, our nobles at last rose, but too late, to assert their rights. Alas! one defeat drove them to despair. Baliol was taken, and themselves obliged to again swear fealty to their enemy. Then came the seizure of the treasures of our monasteries, the burning of the national records, the sequestration of our property, the banishment of our chiefs, the violation of our women, and the slavery or murder of the poor people yoked to the land. ‘The storm of desolation, thus raging over our country, how,’ cried the young warrior to me, ‘can any of her sons shrink from the glory of again attempting her restoration?’ He then informed me that Earl de Warrenne (whom Edward had left lord warden of Scotland)

was ill, and had retired to London, leaving Aymer de Valence as his deputy. To this new tyrant, De Warenne has lately sent a host of mercenaries to hold the south of Scotland in subjection, and to reinforce Cressingham and Ormsby, two noted plunderers, who command northwards from Stirling to the shores of Sutherland.

“With these representations of the conduct of our oppressors, the brave knight demonstrated the facility with which invaders, drunk with power and gorged with rapine, could be vanquished by a resolute and hardy people. The absence of Edward, who is now abroad, increases the probability of success. The knight’s design is to infuse his own spirit into the bosoms of the chiefs in this part of the kingdom. By their assistance, to seize the fortresses in the Lowlands, and so form a chain of repulsion against the admission of fresh troops from England. Then, while other chiefs rise in the Highlands, the Southron garrisons there, being unsupported by supplies, must become an easy prey, and would yield men of consequence, to be exchanged for our countrymen, now prisoners in England. For the present he wishes to be furnished with troops merely enough to take some castle, of power sufficient to give confidence to his friends. On his becoming master of such a place, it should be the signal for all to declare themselves, and, rising at once, overwhelm Edward’s garrisons in every part of Scotland.

“This is the knight’s plan; and for your sake, as well as for the cause, I hope the first fortress he gains may be that of Dumbarton. It has always been considered the key of the country.”

“May heaven grant it,” returned Helen; “and whoever this knight may be, I pray the blessed St. Andrew to guide his arms!”

“If I may venture to guess who he is,” replied the hermit, “I would say, that noble brow was formed to some day wear a crown.”

“What!” cried Helen, starting, “you think this knight is the royal Bruce?”

“I am at a loss what to think,” replied the hermit; “he has a princely air, and there is such an overflowing of soul towards his country, when he speaks of it, that such love can spring from no other than the royal heart, created to foster and to bless it.”

“But is he not too young?” inquired Helen. “I have heard my father say that Bruce, the opponent of Baliol for the crown, was much his senior; and that his son, the Earl of Carrick, must be now fifty years of age. This knight, if I am any judge of looks, cannot be twenty-five.”

“True,” answered the hermit; “and yet he may be a Bruce. For it is neither of the two you have mentioned that I mean, but the grandson of the one, and the son of the other. You may see by this silver beard, lady, that the winter of my life is far spent. The elder Bruce, Robert, Lord of Annandale, was my contemporary; we were boys together, and educated at the same college in Icolmkill. He was brave, and passed his manhood in visiting different courts; at last, marrying a lady of the princely house of Clare, he took her to France, and confided his only son, to be brought up under the renowned Saint Lewis. Young Robert took the cross while quite a youth, and carrying the banner of the holy King of France to the plains of Palestine, covered himself with glory. In storming a Saracen fortress he rescued the person of Prince Edward of England. The horrible tyrant, who now tramples on all laws, human and divine, was then in the bloom of youth, defending the cause of Christianity! Think on that, sweet lady, and marvel at the changing power of ambition!”

“From that hour a strict friendship subsisted between the two young crusaders; and when Edward mounted the throne of England, it being then the ally of Scotland, the old Earl of Annandale, to please his brave son, took up his residence at the English court. When the male issue of our King David failed in the untimely death of Alexander III., then came the contention between Bruce and Baliol for the vacant crown. Our most venerable chiefs, the guardians of our laws, and the witnesses of the parliamentary settlement made on the house of Bruce during the reign of the late king, all declared for Lord Annandale. He was not only the male heir in propinquity of blood, but his experienced years and known virtues excited all true Scots to place him on the throne.

“Meanwhile, Edward, forgetting friendship to his friend, and fidelity to an ally, was undermining the interest of Bruce and the peace of the kingdom. Inferior rivals to our favourite prince were soon discountenanced; but by covert ways the King of England raised such an opposition on the side of Baliol as threatened a civil war. Secure in his right, and averse to

plunge his country in blood, Bruce easily fell in with a proposal hinted to him by one of Edward's creatures,—‘to require that monarch to be umpire between him and Baliol.’ Then it was that Edward, after soliciting the requisition as an honour to be conferred on him, declared it was his right as supreme lord of Scotland. The Earl of Annandale refused to acknowledge this assumption. Baliol bowed to it, and for such obedience the unrighteous judge gave him the crown. Bruce absolutely refused to acknowledge the justice of this decision ; and he immediately left the scene of action, going over seas to join his son, who had been cajoled away to Paris. But, alas ! he died on the road of a broken heart.

“ When his son Robert (who was Earl of Carrick in right of his wife) returned to Britain, he, like his father, disdained to acknowledge Baliol as king. But being more incensed at his successful rival, than at the treachery of his false friend Edward, he believed his glossing speeches ; and—by what infatuation I cannot tell—established his residence at that monarch's court. This forgetfulness of his royal blood, and of the independency of Scotland, has nearly obliterated him from every Scottish heart : for, when we look at Bruce the courtier, we cease to remember Bruce the descendant of St. David—Bruce the valiant knight of the Cross, who bled for true liberty before the walls of Jerusalem.

“ His eldest son may be now about the age of the young knight who has just left us ; and when I look on his royal port, and listen to the patriotic fervours of his soul, I cannot but think that the spirit of his noble grandsire has revived in his breast, and that, leaving his indolent father to the vassal luxuries of Edward's palace, he is come hither in secret to arouse Scotland, and to assert his claim.”

“ It is very likely,” rejoined Helen, deeply sighing ; “ and may heaven reward his virtue with the crown of his ancestors ! ”

“ To that end,” replied the hermit, “ shall my hands be lifted up in prayer day and night. May I, O Gracious Power ! ” cried he, looking upwards, and pressing the cross to the breast, “ live but to see that hero victorious, and Scotland free ; and then ‘ let Thy servant depart in peace, since mine eyes will have seen her salvation ! ’ ”

“ Her salvation, father ? ” said Helen, timidly. “ Is not that too sacred a word to apply to anything, however dear, that relates to earth ? ”

she blushed as she spoke ; and fearful of having too daringly objected, looked down as she awaited his answer. The hermit observed her attentively ; and, with a benign smile, replied, " Earth and heaven are the work of the Creator. He careth alike for angel and for man ; and therefore nothing that He has made is too mean to be the object of His *salvation*. Happiness can only be found in virtue ; virtue cannot exist without liberty ; and the seat of liberty is good laws ! This it is to be free : this it is to be virtuous ; this it is to be happy ; this it is to live the life of righteousness, and to die in the hope of immortal glory. Say then, dear daughter, if, in praying for the liberty of Scotland, I said too much in calling it her *salvation* ? "

" Forgive me, father," cried Helen, overcome with shame at having questioned him.

" Forgive you what ? " returned he. " I love the holy zeal which is jealous of allowing objects dear even to your wishes, to encroach on the sanctuary of heaven. Be ever thus, meek child of the Church, and no human idol will be able to usurp that part of your virgin heart which belongs to God."

Helen blushed. " My heart, reverend father," returned she, " has but one wish—the liberty of Scotland ; and, with that, the safety of my father and his brave deliverers."

" Sir William Wallace I have never seen," rejoined the hermit ; " but, from what you have said, I do not doubt his being a worthy supporter of Bruce. However, as it is only a suspicion of mine that this knight is that young prince, for his safety, and for the sake of the cause, we must not let that name escape our lips. Till he reveals his own secret, for us to divulge it would be folly and dishonour."

Helen, fatigued in spirit and in body, thanked the good hermit for his care ; and bowing to his blessing, he left her to repose.

CHAPTER XVII.

CARTILANE CRAIGS AND GLENFINLASS.

Guided by Ker, Murray led his followers over the Lanark Hills by the most untrodden paths ; and hence avoided even the sight of a Southron soldier.

Cheered by so favourable a commencement of their expedition, they felt no dismay when, at the gloom of the evening, Ker descried a body of armed men at a distance, sitting round a fire at the foot of a rock which guards the western entrance

to the Cartlane Craigs. Murray ordered his men to proceed under covert of the bushes ; and then making the signal (concerted in case of such dilemma), they struck their iron crow's into the interstices of the cliff, and catching at the branches which grew out of its precipitous side, with much exertion, but in perfect silence, at last gained the summit. That effected, they pursued their way with the same caution, till after a long march, and without encountering a human being, they reached the base of the huge rock which Wallace had made his fortress.

Ker, who expected to find it surrounded by an English army, was amazed at the deathlike solitude. "The place is deserted," cried he. "My brave friend, compelled by the extremity of his little garrison, has been obliged to surrender."

"We will ascend and see," was Murray's answer.

Ker led round the rock to the most accessible point, and with some difficulty gained the top. Silence pervaded every part, and the rugged cavities, which had formed the temporary quarters of his comrades, were lonely. On entering the recess where Wallace used to seek a few minutes' slumber, the moon, which shone full into the cave, discovered something bright lying in a distant corner. Ker hastily approached it, recollecting what Wallace had told him, that if during his absence he could find means of escape, he would leave some weapon as a sign ; a dagger, if necessity drove him to the south point, where he must fight his way through the valley ; and an arrow, if he could effect it without observation, by the north, as he should then seek an asylum for his exhausted followers in the far-off wilds of Glenfinlass.

It was the iron head of an arrow which the moon had silvered, and Ker, catching it up, exclaimed, "He is safe ! this calls us to Glenfinlass." He then explained to Murray the arrangement of Wallace respecting this sign, and without hesitation the young lord decided to follow him up that track.

Traversing the lower part of Stirlingshire they crossed Graham's Dyke,* and pursuing their course westward, left Stirling Castle far to the right. They ascended the Ochil Hills, and proceeding along the wooded heights which overhang the banks of Teith, forded that river, and entered at once into the

* The great wall of Severus, which runs between Abercorn and Kirkpatrick, being attacked by the Scots at the time the Romans abandoned Britain, a huge breach was made in it by Graham (or Greame), the uncle of the young king of Scots. By this achievement he conquered the whole of the country as far as the Cheviots, and the wall of Severus has since been called Graham's Dyke.

broad valley which opened to them a distant view of Ben Lomond and Ben Ledi.

"There," exclaimed Ker, extending his hand towards the cloud-capped Ledi, "beneath the shadow of that mountain we shall find the light of Scotland, our dear master in arms!"

At this intimation the wearied Murrays uttered a shout of joy, and hastening forward with renovated strength, met a foaming river in their path. Despising all obstacles, they rushed in, and, buffeting the waves, soon found a firm footing on the opposite shore.

Murray led promptly forward by a steep road in the side of the mountain. As they clung by the slippery rocks which overhung the lake, its mists dissolved into a heavy shower, and, by degrees clearing away, discovered the shining heads of Ben Lomond and Ben Uochan. The party soon entered a precipitous labyrinth of craigs; and, passing onward, gradually descended till the augmented roar of waters intimated to Murray they drew near the great fall of Glenfinlass.

The awful entrance to this valley struck the whole party with a feeling that made them pause. It seemed as if to these sacred solitudes, hidden in the very bosom of Scotland, no hostile foot dared intrude. Murray looked at Ker: "We go, my friend, to arouse the genius of our country. Here are the native fastnesses of Scotland, and from this pass the spirit will issue that is to bid her enslaved sons and daughters be free."

They entered, and pursued their way along the western border of Loch Lubnaig, till the royal heights of Craignacoheilg showed their summits, covered with heath and many an ivied turret. The forest, stretching far over the valley, lost its high trees in the shadows of the surrounding mountains, and told them they were now in the centre of Glenfinlass.

Ker put his bugle to his lips and sounded the pibroch of Elderslie. A thousand echoes returned the notes, and after a pause, which allowed their last response to die away, the air was answered by a horn from the heights of Craignacoheilg. An armed man then appeared on the rock, leaning forward. Ker drew near, and taking off his bonnet, called aloud—"Stephen! it is William Ker who speaks. I come with the Lord Andrew Murray of Bothwell to the support of our commander, Sir William Wallace."

At these words, Stephen placed his bugle to his mouth, and in a few minutes the rock was covered with the members of

its little garrison. Women and children appeared, shouting with joy ; and the men hastened to bid their comrade welcome. One advanced towards Murray, whom he instantly recognised to be Sir Roger Kirkpatrick of Torthorald.

The chiefs saluted each other, and Lord Andrew pointed to his men : “ I have brought,” said he, “ these few brave fellows to the aid of Sir William Wallace. They should have been more, but for new events of Southron outrage. Yet I am impatient to lead them to the presence of my uncle’s preserver.”

Kirkpatrick’s answer disappointed the eager spirit of the young warrior : “ I am sorry, brave Murray, that you have no better knight to receive you than myself. I and the gallant chief have not yet met, but I am in arms for him, and the hour of retribution for all our injuries, I trust, is at hand.”

“ But where is Sir William Wallace ? ” demanded Murray.

“ Gone towards the Forth, to rouse that part of sleeping Scotland.”

As he spoke, he led Murray to the rampart-like cliffs which crown the summit of Craignacoheigl. In the midst stood a tower, which had once been a favourite hunting-lodge of the great King Fergus. There Kirkpatrick joyfully greeted his guest a second time : “ This,” said he, “ is the far-famed *lodge of the three kings* ; here did our lion, Fergus, attended by his royal allies, Durstus the Pict, and Dionethus the Briton, spread his board during their huntings in Glenfinlass ! And here eight hundred years ago, did the same heroic prince form the plans which saved his kingdom from a foreign yoke ! On the same spot we will lay ours ; and in their completion rescue Scotland from a tyranny more intolerable than that which menaced him. Yes, Murray, there is not a stone in this building that does not call aloud to us to draw the sword, and hold it unsheathed till our country be free.”

“ And by the ghost of that same Fergus, I swear,” exclaimed Murray, “ that my claymore shall never shroud its head while an invader be left alive in Scotland.”

Kirkpatrick caught him in his arms. “ Brave son of the noble Bothwell, thou art after mine own heart ! The blow which the dastard Cressingham durst aim at a Scottish chief still smarts upon my cheek, and rivers of his countrymen’s blood shall wash out the stain. After I had been persuaded by his serpent eloquence to swear fealty to Edward on the defeat at Dunbar, I vainly thought that Scotland had only

changed a weak and unfortunate prince for a wise and victorious king; but when in the courts of Stirling, I heard Cressingham propose to the barons north of the dyke, that they should give their strongest castles into English hands; when I opposed the measure with all the indignation of a Scot who saw himself betrayed, he first tried to overturn my arguments, and finding that impossible, when I repeated them with redoubled force—he struck me!

“Covered with dishonour by a blow I could not avenge, I fled to my brother-in-law, Sir John Scott of Loch Doine. With him I buried my injury from the world; but it lived in my heart—it haunted me day and night, calling for revenge. In such an hour how did I receive the tidings that Sir William Wallace was in arms against the tyrant! It was the voice of retribution calling me to peace of mind! Two days I have been here, awaiting in impatience the arrival of Wallace.”

“But what,” asked Murray, “are the forces you deem sufficient for so great an enterprise? How many fighting men may be counted of Wallace’s own company, besides your own?”

“We have here about a hundred,” replied Kirkpatrick, “including yours.”

“How inadequate to storm so formidable a place as Stirling Castle!” returned Murray. “Having, indeed, passed the Rubicon, we must go forward, but resolution, not rashness, should be the principle of our actions. And my opinion is, that a few minor advantages obtained, our countrymen would flock to our standard, the enemy would be intimidated, and we should carry thousands, instead of hundreds, before the walls of Stirling. To attempt it now would invite defeat, and pluck upon us the ruin of our entire project.”

“You are right, young man,” cried Kirkpatrick; “my grey head, rendered impetuous by insult, did not pause on the blind temerity of my scheme. I would rather for years watch the opportunity of taking a signal revenge than not accomplish it at last! Oh! I would rather waste all my life in these solitary wilds and know that at the close of it I should see the blood of Cressingham on these hands than live a prince and die unrevenged!”

Stephen and Ker now entered; the latter paid his respects to Sir Roger, and the former informed Murray that having disposed his present followers with those who had arrived

before, he was come to lead their lord to some refreshment in the banqueting-room of the tower. "What!" cried Murray, full of glad amazement; "is it possible that my cousin's faithful band has reached its destination? None other belonging to Bothwell Castle had any chance of escaping its gaoler's hands."

Kirkpatrick interrupted Stephen's reply by saying that while their guests were at the board he would watch the arrival of certain expresses from two brave Drummonds, each of whom were to send him a hundred men: "So, my good Lord Andrew," cried he, striking him on the shoulder, "shall the snow-ball gather that is to fall on Edward to his destruction."

Murray heartily shared his zeal, and bidding him a short adieu, followed Stephen and Ker into the hall. A haunch of venison of Glenfinlass smoked on the board, and wine from the cellars of Sir John Scott brightened the hopes which glowed in every heart.

While the young chieftains were recruiting their exhausted strength, Stephen sat at the table to satisfy the anxiety of Murray to know how the detachment from Bothwell had come to Craignacoheilig, and by what fortunate occurrence, or signal act of bravery, Wallace could have escaped with his whole train from the foe-surrounded Cartlane Craigs.

"Heaven smiled on us!" replied Stephen. "The very evening of the day on which Ker left us there was a carousal in the English camp. We heard the sound of riot, and of many an insult cast upon our besieged selves. But about an hour after sunset the noise sunk by degrees—a no insufficient hint that the revellers had fallen asleep. 'Now is the moment!' said our gallant leader, 'the enemy are stupefied with wine, the rock is clothed in a veil!—it is the shield of God that is held before us! under its shelter let us pass from their hands!'

"He called us together, and making the proper dispositions, commanded the children and women, on their lives, to keep silence. He then led us to the top of the northern cliff; it overhung an obscure cave which he knew opened at its extremity. By the assistance of a rope, held above by several men, our resolute chief made his way down the rock, and was the first who descended. He stood at the bottom, enveloped in the cloud which shrouded the mountain, till all the men of the first division had cleared the height; he then marshalled them with their pikes towards the foe, in case of an alarm.

But all remained quiet on that spot, although the sounds of voices, both in song and laughter, intimated that the utmost precaution was still necessary, as a wakeful and yet revelling part of the enemy were not far distant.

“Wallace reascended the rock half-way, and receiving the children, which their trembling mothers lowered into his arms, he handed them to the old men, who carried them safely through the bushes which obscured the cave’s mouth. The rest of our little garrison soon followed; then our sentinels, receiving the signal that all were safe, drew silently from their guard, and closed our march through the cavern.

“This effected, we blocked up its egress, that, should our escape be discovered, the enemy might not find the direct road we had taken.

“We pursued our course without stop or stay till we reached the hospitable valleys of Stirlingshire. There some kind shepherds gave the women and children temporary shelter; and Wallace, seeing that if anything were to be done for Scotland, he must swell his host, put the party under my guidance, giving me orders that when they were rested I should march them to Glenfinlass, here to await his return. Selecting ten men, he turned towards the Forth, hoping to meet some friends in that part of the country ready to embrace her cause.

“He had hardly been an hour departed when Dugald observed a procession of monks descending the opposite mountain. They drew near and halted in the glen. A crowd of women from the neighbouring hills had followed the train, and were now gathering round a bier which the monks set down. I know not by what happy fortune I came close to the leader of the procession, but he saw something in my features that declared me an honest Scot. ‘Friend,’ whispered he, ‘for charity conduct us to some safe place where we may withdraw this bier from the sacrilegious eye of curiosity.’

“I made no hesitation, but desired the train to follow me into a byre belonging to the good shepherd who was my host. On this motion the common people went away, and the monks entered the place.

“When the travellers threw up their hoods, which as mourners they had worn over their faces, I could not help exclaiming, ‘Alas, for the glory of Scotland, that this goodly group of stout young men rather wore the helmet than the cowl!’ ‘How!’ asked their principal (who did not appear to

have seen thirty years), 'do we not pray for the glory of Scotland? Such is our weapon.' 'True,' replied I, 'but while Moses prayed Joshua fought. God gives the means of glory that they should be used.' 'But for what, old veteran,' said the monk, with a penetrating look, 'should we exchange our cowl for the helmet? knowest thou anything of the Joshua who would lead us to the field?' There was something in the young priest's eyes that seemed to contradict his pacific words—they flashed an impetuous fire. My reply was short: 'Are you a Scot?' 'I am, in soul, and in arms.' 'Then knowest thou not the chief of Elderslie?' As I spoke, for I stood close to the bier, I perceived the pall shake. The monk answered my last question with an exclamation: 'You mean Sir William Wallace!'"

" 'Yes!' I replied. The bier shook more violently at these words, and, with my hair bristling, I saw the pall hastily thrown off and a beautiful youth, in a shroud, started from it, crying aloud, 'Then is our pilgrimage at an end! Lead us to him!'

"The monk perceived my terror, and hastily exclaimed, 'Fear not! he is alive, and seeks Sir William Wallace. His pretended death was a stratagem to ensure our passage through the English army, for we are soldiers like yourself.' As he spoke, he opened his grey habit, and showed me the mailed tartan beneath."

"What, then!" interrupted Murray, "these monks were my faithful clansmen?"

"The same," replied Stephen: "I assured them they might now resume their own characters, for all who inhabited the valley we were then in were true, though poor and aged Scots. The young had long been drafted by Edward's agents to fight his battles abroad."

" 'Ah!' interrupted the shrouded youth, 'are we a people that can die for the honour of this usurper, and are we ignorant how to do it for our country? Lead us, soldier of Wallace,' cried he, stepping resolutely on the ground, 'lead us to your brave master and tell him that a few determined men are come to shed their blood for him and Scotland.'

"This astonishing youth stood before me in his robes of death like the spirit of some bright-haired son of Fingal. I looked on him with admiration, and explaining our situation, told him whither Wallace was gone, and of our destination to await him in the forest of Glenfinlass."

"But where," demanded Murray, who had listened with astonishment to this recital, "where is this admirable youth? Why, if Kenneth have learnt I am arrived, does he not bring him to receive my thanks and friendship?"

"It is my fault," returned Stephen, "that Kenneth will not approach you till your repast is over. I left him to see your followers properly refreshed. And for the youth he seems timid of appearing before you. Even his name I cannot make known to you till he reveals it himself; none know him here by any other than that of Edwin. He has, however, granted to-morrow morning for the interview."

"I must submit to his determination," replied Murray; "but I am at a loss to guess why so brave a creature should hesitate to meet me. I can only suppose he dislikes the idea of resigning the troop he has so well conducted; and if so, I shall think it my duty to yield its command to him."

"Indeed, he richly deserves it," returned Stephen; "for the very soul of Wallace seemed transfused into his breast, as he cheered us through our long march from the valley to Glenfinlass. He played with the children, heartened up the women, and when the men were weary and laggard by the way, he sat him down on the nearest stones, and sang to us legends of our ancestors till every nerve was braced, and starting up, we proceeded onward with resolution, and even gaiety."

"When we arrived at Craignacoheilig, I suddenly recollected that I had an old friend in the neighbourhood. When a boy, I had been the playfellow of Sir John Scott of Loch Doine, and though I understood him to be now an invalid, I went to him. While I told my tale, his brother-in-law, Sir Roger Kirkpatrick, took fire at my relation, and declared his determination to accompany me to Craignacoheilig; and when he joined our band on the summit of this rock, he took the children in his arms, and while he held their hands in his, vehemently addressed their mothers, 'Let not these hands be baptized * till they have been washed in the blood of our foe. Mercy belongs not to the enemy, now doomed to fall beneath their father's swords!'"

"It is, indeed, a deadly contest," rejoined Murray; "for evil has been the example of that foe. How many innocent bosoms have their steel pierced! How many helpless

* It was a custom with Scottish chiefs, when any feud existed between their families, to leave the right hand of their children untouched by the holy water in baptism as a sign that no law, even of heaven, should prevent them taking revenge.

babes have their merciless hands dashed against the stones ! Oh, ruthless war, even a soldier trembles to contemplate thy horrors."

"Only till he can avenge them!" cried a stern voice, entering the apartment. It was Kirkpatrick's, and he proceeded: "When vengeance is in our grasp, tell me, Murray, who will tremble? Dost thou not feel retribution in thine own hands? Dost thou not see the tyrant's blood at thy feet?" As he spoke, he looked down, with a horrid exultation in his eyes, and bursting into a more horrible laugh, struck his hand several times on his heart: "It glads me! it glads me! I shall see it—and this arm shall assist to pull him down."

"His power in Scotland may fall," returned Murray; "but Edward will be too careful of his life to come within reach of our steel."

"That may be," rejoined Kirkpatrick; "but my dagger shall yet drink the blood of his agents. Cressingham shall feel my foot upon his neck! Cressingham shall see that hand torn from its wrist which durst violate the unsullied cheek of a true Scotsman. Murray, I cannot live unrevenged."

As he spoke, he quitted the apartment, and with a countenance of such tremendous fate, that the young warrior doubted it washuman; it spoke not the noble resolves of patriotism, but the portentous malignity with which the great adversary of mankind determines the ruin of nations; and Murray almost thought that the clouds darkened as the gloomy knight issued from the porch into the open air.

Kenneth Mackenzie joyfully entered the hall. Murray received him with a warm embrace; and soon after Stephen Ireland led the wearied chieftain to a bed of freshly-gathered heath, prepared for him in an upper chamber.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CRAIGNACOEILG.

DEEP and life-restoring was the rest of the youthful Murray, till the shrill notes of bugles made him start. He listened; they sounded again. The morning had fully broke. He sprung from his couch, hurried on his armour, and snatching up his lance and target, issued from the tower. Several women were flying past the gate. On seeing him they exclaimed,

"The Lord Wallace is arrived—his bugles have sounded—our husbands are returned!"

Murray followed their eager footsteps, and reached the edge of the rock, just as the brave group were ascending. A stranger was also there, who, from his extreme youth and elegance, he judged must be the young protector of his clansmen; but he forebore to address him until they should be presented to each other by Wallace himself.

It was indeed the same. On hearing the first blast of the horn the youthful chieftain had hastened from his bed, and buckling on his brigandine, rushed to the rock; but at the sight of the noble figure, which first gained the summit, the young hero fell back. An indescribable awe checked his steps, and he stood at a distance, while Kirkpatrick welcomed the chief and introduced Lord Andrew Murray. Wallace received the latter with a glad smile; and taking him warmly by the hand, "Gallant Murray," said he, "with such assistance I hope to reinstate your brave uncle in Bothwell Castle, and soon to cut a passage to even a mightier rescue! We must carry off Scotland from the tyrant's arms, or," added he in a graver tone, "we shall only rivet her chains the closer."

"I am but a poor auxiliary," returned Murray; "my troop is a scanty one, for it is of my own gathering. It is not my father's nor my uncle's strength that I bring along with me. But there is one here," continued he, "who has preserved a party of men, sent by my cousin Lady Helen Mar, almost double my numbers."

At this reference to the youthful warrior Sir Roger Kirkpatrick discerned him at a distance, and hastened towards him, while Murray briefly related the extraordinary conduct of this unknown. On being told that the chief waited to receive him, the youth hastened forward with a trepidation he never had felt before; but it was the timidity of a noble heart which believed it approached one of the most perfect among mortals; and while its anxious pulse beat to emulate such merit, a generous consciousness of inferiority embarrassed him with a confusion so amiable, that Wallace, who perceived his youth and emotion, opened his arms and embraced him. "Brave youth," cried he, "I trust that the power which blesses our cause will enable me to return you with many a well-earned glory to the bosom of your family!"

Edwin was encouraged by the frank address of a hero whom

he expected to have found reserved, and wrapped in the gloom of the fate which had aroused him to be a thunderbolt of heaven ; but when he saw a benign though pale countenance hail him with smiles, he made an effort to shake off the awe with which the name and mien of Wallace had oppressed him, and with a mantling blush he replied—"My family are worthy of your esteem ; my father is brave, but my mother, fearing for me, prevailed on him to put me into a monastery. Dreading the power of the English, even there she allowed none but the abbot to know who I was. And as he chose to hide my name—and I have burst from concealment without her knowledge—till I do something worthy of that name, and deserving her pardon, permit me, noble Wallace, to follow your footsteps by the simple appellation of Edwin."

"Noble boy," returned the chief, "your wish shall be respected. We urge you no further to reveal what such innate bravery must shortly proclaim in the most honourable manner."

The whole of the troop having ascended, while their wives, children, and friends were rejoicing in their embraces, Wallace asked some questions relative to Bothwell, and Murray briefly related the disasters which had happened there.

"My father," added he, "is still with the Lord of Lochawe, and thither I sent to request him to despatch to the Cartlane Craigs all the followers he took with him into Argyleshire. But as things are, would it not be well to send a second messenger to say that you have sought refuge in Glenfinlass ?"

"Before he could arrive," returned Wallace, "I hope we shall be where Lord Bothwell's reinforcements may reach us by water. The Frasers of Oliver Castle have given me two hundred men ; and Sir Alexander Scrymgeour, whom I met in West Lothian, has not only brought fifty stout Scots to my command, but, as hereditary standard-bearer of the kingdom, has come himself to carry the royal banner of Scotland to glory or oblivion !"

"To glory !" cried Murray, waving his sword ; "O ! not while a Scot survives shall that golden lion* again lick the dust !"

"No," cried Kirkpatrick, his eyes flashing fire ; "rather may every Scot and every Southron fall in the struggle, and fill one grave ! Let me," cried he, sternly grasping the hilt of

* A lion gules, in a field d'or, is the arms of Scotland.

his sword, and looking upwards, "let me, oh, Saviour of mankind, be buried where the Forth and the Clyde, so often reddened with our blood, dye the eastern and the western oceans with the real blood of those our foes; and when none is spared, then let me die in peace."

The eyes of Wallace glanced on the young Edwin, who stood reeling on Kirkpatrick, and turning on the knight with a powerful look of reprobation—"Check that prayer," cried he, "remember my brave companion, what the Saviour of mankind was, and then think whether He who offered His blood for all the world will listen to so damning an invocation. If we would be blessed in the contest we must be merciful."

"To whom?" exclaimed Kirkpatrick; "to the robbers who rob from us our lands, to the villains who wrest from us our honours? But you are parent; you never received a blow?"

"Yes," said Wallace, turning pale, "a heavy one—on my heart."

"True," resumed Kirkpatrick, "your wife fell under the steel of a Scottish governor; and you slew him for it! You were revenged; your feelings were appeased."

"Not the steel of fifty thousand governors," replied Wallace, "could appease my feelings. Revenge were worthless to satisfy the yearnings of my soul!" For a moment he turned the agonised features with his hand, and then proceeded, "I saw Heselrige because he was a monster under every the same ground. My sorrow, deep as it was, was his joy; and when his rapacity and his nephew's gentleness had produced. Both fell beneath my arm, but I do not remember the whole nation without reserve? Many of the English were too just to share in the subjugation of the country they had sworn to defend. And their few honourable exceptions, when their sea-Scotches no longer consented to their own degradation, may take shame to themselves for assisting to betray a confiding people."

"That may be," returned Kirkpatrick; "but surely you would not wish Angus de Vulture and Dunsinham amongst these conscientious English?"

"No," replied Wallace, "the oppression of the one, and the weakness of the other, have given Scotland too many wounds for me to hold a shield before them; meet them, and I leave them to your sword."

“And by heavens!” cried Kirkpatrick, “they shall know its point!”

Wallace then informed his friends he purposed marching next morning by daybreak towards Dumbarton Castle—“When we make the attack,” said he, “it must be in the night, for I propose seizing it by storm.”

Murray and Kirkpatrick joyfully acquiesced. Edwin smiled assent, and Wallace, with many a gracious look and speech, disengaged himself from the clinging embraces of the weaker part of the garrison, who clung to him as to a presiding deity.

Filled with enthusiasm, the women uttered a shout of triumph, and embracing their husbands, declared they were ready to resign them wholly to heaven and Sir William Wallace.

Wallace left them with these tender relatives, from whom they were so soon to part, and retired with his chieftains to arrange the plan of his attack.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE CLIFFS OF LOCH LUBNAIG.

IN the evening Kenneth entered, and told Edwin that Sir William Wallace had called out his little army to see its strength and numbers. Edwin’s soul had become not more enamoured of the panoply of war than of the gracious smiles of his leader, and at this intelligence he threw his plaid over his brigandine, and placing a swan-plumed bonnet on his brow, hastened to meet his general.

The heights of Craignacoheilg echoed with footsteps, and a glittering light seemed issuing from her woods, as the rays of the sun glanced on the arms of her assembling warriors.

The thirty followers of Murray appeared just as the two hundred Frasers entered from an opening in the rocks. Blood mounted into his face as he compared his inferior numbers and recollected the obligation they were to repay, and the greater one he was now going to incur. However, he threw the standard worked by Helen on his shoulder, and turning to Wallace, “Behold,” cried he, pointing to his men, “the poor man’s mite! It is great, for it is my all!”

“Great indeed, brave Murray!” returned Wallace, “for it brings me a host in yourself.”

Wallace grasped his hand. “And I pledge you mine, that

the head whence it grew shall be laid low before I suffer so generous a defender to be separated, dead or alive, from this standard." His eyes glanced at the impresse: "Thou art right," continued he; "God doth indeed arm thee; and in the strength of a righteous cause, thou goest with the confidence of success to embrace victory as a bride!"

"No, I am only the bridegroom's man!" replied Murray, gaily moving off; "I shall be content with a kiss or two from the hand-maids, and leave the lady for my general."

"Happy youth!" said Wallace to himself, as his eye pursued the young chieftain; "no conquering affection has yet thrown open thy heart! Patriotism is a virgin passion in thy breast, and innocence and joy wait upon her!"

Ker, who acted as henchman to Wallace, now returned to the ranks to give the word, and they all marched forward.

Sir Alexander Scrymgeour, with his golden standard charged with the lion of Scotland, led the van. Wallace raised his bonnet from his head as it drew near. Scrymgeour lowered the staff. Wallace threw up his hand at the action, but the knight not understanding him he stepped forward. "Sir Alexander Scrymgeour," cried he, "that standard must not bow to me. It represents the royalty of Scotland, before which we fight for our liberties. If virtue yet dwell in the house of St. David, some of his offspring will hear of this day, and lead it forward to conquest and a crown. Till such an hour let not that standard bend to any man."

Wallace fell back as he spoke, and Scrymgeour, bowing his head, marched on.

Sir Roger Kirkpatrick, at the head of his Highlanders, next advanced. His blood-red banner streamed to the air, and as it bent to Wallace he saw that the indignant knight had adopted the device of the hardy king Achaius,* but with a fiercer motto,—"*Touch, and I pierce!*"

"That man," thought Wallace, as he passed along, "carries a relentless sword in his very eye!"

The men of Loch Doine, a strong and well-armed body, marched on, and gave place to the corps of Bothwell. The eye of Wallace felt as if turning from gloom to the cheerful light of day when it fell on the bright face of Murray. Kenneth with his troop followed; and the youthful Edwin closed the procession.

*Achaius, King of Scotland, took for his device the Thistle and the Rewe, and for his motto, *For my defence*.

Being drawn up in line, their chief advanced towards them, and expressing his sentiments of the patriotism which brought them into the field, informed them of his intended march. He then turned to Stephen Ireland : "The sun has now set," said he, "and before dark you must conduct the families of my worthy Lanarkmen to the protection of Sir John Scott. It is time that age, infancy, and female weakness should cease their wanderings with us ; to-night we bid them adieu, to meet them again, by the leading of the Lord of Hosts, in freedom and prosperity !"

As Wallace ceased, several old men, and young women with their babes in their arms, rushed from behind the ranks, and caught hold of his hands and garments. "We go," said the venerable fathers, "to pray for your welfare ; and sure we are a crown will bless our country's benefactor, here or in heaven !"

"In heaven," replied Wallace, shaking the plumes of his bonnet over his eyes, to hide the moisture which suffused them ; "I can have no right to any other crown."

"Yes," cried a hoary-headed shepherd, "you free your country from tyrants, and the people's hearts will proclaim their deliverer their sovereign !"

"May your rightful monarch, worthy patriarch," said Wallace, "whether a Bruce or a Baliol, meet with equal zeal from Scotland at large, and tyranny must then fall before courage and loyalty !"

The women wept as they clung to his hand, and held up their children towards him. "Here," cried they, "we devote them to heaven and to our country ! Adopt them, noble Wallace, to be thy followers in arms, when, perhaps, their fathers are laid low !"

Unable to speak, Wallace pressed their little faces separately to his lips, then returning them to their mothers, answered in an agitated voice, "They are mine !—my weal shall be theirs—my woe my own." As he spoke he hurried from the weeping group, and hid himself from their tears and their blessings.

He threw himself on a rock, whose fern-covered bosom projected over the waters of Loch Lubnaig, and turned his full eyes upon the lake beneath ; and while he contemplated its serene surface, he sighed, and thought how tranquil was nature, till the rebellious passions of man, wearying of innocent

joys, disturbed all by restlessness and invasion on the peace and happiness of others.

The mists of evening hung on the tops of Ben Ledi and Ben Vorlich ; then by degrees obscured the whole of the mountains, leaving nothing for the eye to dwell on but the long silent expanse of the waters below.

"So," said he, "did I once believe myself for ever shut in from the world by an obscurity that promised me happiness as well as seclusion ! But the hours of Elderslie are gone ! No tender wife will now twine her arms around my neck. No child of Marion's will ever be pressed to my bosom ! No, blessed God !" cried he, stretching his hands towards heaven ; "endow me with Thine own Spirit and I shall yet lead my countrymen to liberty and happiness !"

Tears, the first he had shed since the hour in which he last pressed his Marion to his heart, now flowed copiously from his eyes. The women, the children, had aroused all his recollections, but in so softened a train that they melted his heart. "It is thy just tribute, Marion !" said he ; "it was blood you shed for me, and shall I check these poor drops ! Look on me, best-beloved of my soul ; O ! hover near in the day of battle, and thousands of thine and Scotland's enemies shall fall before thy husband's arm !"

The plaintive voice of the Highland pipe at this moment broke upon his ear. It was the farewell of the patriarch Lindsay, as he and his company descended the paths of Craignacoheilig. Wallace started on his feet.

As he drew near he saw some standing on the cliff, and others leaning over, to catch another glance of the departing group ere it was lost amid the shades of Glenfinlass.

"Are they gone ?" asked Dugald. "Quite," answered a young man, who seemed to have got the most advantageous situation for a view. "Then," cried he, "may St. Andrew keep them till we meet again !"

"May a greater than St. Andrew hear thy prayer !" ejaculated Wallace. At the sound of this response from their chief they all turned round. "My brave companions," said he, "I come to repay this hour's pang by telling you that, in the attack of Dumbarton, you shall have the honour of first mounting the walls. I shall be at your head to sign each brave soldier with a patriot's seal of honour."

"To follow you, my lord," said Dugald, "is our duty."

"I grant it," replied the chief; "and as I am the leader in that duty, it is mine to dispense to every man his reward; to prove to all men that virtue alone is true nobility."

"Ah, dearest sir!" exclaimed Edwin, who had been assisting the women to carry their infants down the steep, and on reascending heard the latter part of this conversation; "deprive me not of the aim of my life! These warriors have had you long—have distinguished themselves in your eyes. Deprive me not, then, of the advantages of being near you; it will make me doubly brave. O! let me only carry to the grave the consciousness that, next to yourself, I was the first to mount the rock of Dumbarton, and you will make me noble indeed!"

Wallace looked at him with a smile of such graciousness that the youth threw himself into his arms; "You will grant my boon?"

"I will," said he: "act up to your sentiments, and you shall be my brother."

"Call me by that name," cried Edwin, "and I will dare anything!"

"Then be the first to follow me on the rock," said he, "and I will lead you to an honour, the highest in my gift: you shall unloose the chains of the Earl of Mar! And ye," continued he, turning to his men, "ye shall not find your country slow to commemorate the duty of such sons. Being the first to strike the blow for her freedom, ye shall be the first she will distinguish. I now speak as her minister; and, as a badge to times immemorial, I bid you wear the Scottish lion on your shields."

A shout of joy issued from every heart; and Wallace, seeing that honour had dried the tears of regret, left them to repose. He sent Edwin to his rest; and himself, avoiding the other chieftains, retired to his own chamber in the tower.

CHAPTER XX.

LOCH LOMOND.

THE first clarion of the lark awakened Wallace. The dawn shone in at the window, and a fresh breeze wooed him to rise and meet it. But the impulse was in his own mind; he needed nothing outward to call him to action. Rising immediately, he put on his glittering hauberk, and issuing from

the tower, raised his bugle to his lips, and blew so rousing a blast that in an instant the whole rock was covered with soldiers.

Wallace advanced towards them, just as Edwin had joined him, and Sir Roger Kirkpatrick appeared from the tower. "Blest be this morn!" cried the old knight. "My sword springs from its scabbard to meet it; and ere its good steel be sheathed again," continued he, shaking it sternly, "what deaths may dye its point!"

Offended at such savageness, but without answering him, Wallace drew towards Murray, and calling to Edwin, ordered him to march at his side. The youth seemed glad of the summons, and Wallace was pleased to observe it, as he thought that a longer stay with one who so grossly overcharged the feelings of honest patriotism, might breed disgust in his innocent mind against a cause which had so furious and therefore unjust a defender.

"Justice and mercy ever dwell together," said he to Edwin, "for universal love is the parent of justice as well as of mercy. But implacable revenge! whence did she spring, but from the head of Satan himself?"

Though their cause appeared the same, never were two spirits more discordant than those of Wallace and Kirkpatrick. But Kirkpatrick did not so soon discover the dissimilarity, as it is easier for purity to descry its opposite, than for foulness to apprehend that anything can be purer than itself.

The forces being marshalled according to the preconcerted order, the three commanders, with Wallace at their head, assembled in the van. Kenneth Mackenzie and Stephen Ireland (now returned from Sir John Scott's) covered the rear.

They passed through the forest of Glenfinlass; and morning and evening still found them threading its solitudes in unmolested security; night, too, watched their onward march.

The sun had just risen as the band of patriots emerged upon the eastern bank of Loch Lomond. The bases of the mountains were yet covered from the mist of the morning, and hardly distinguishable from the blue waters of the lake. The newly-awakened sheep bleated from the hills, and the unbrageous herbage, dropping dew, seemed glittering with a thousand fairy gems.

"Where is the man who would not fight for such a country?"

exclaimed Murray, as he stepped over a bridge of interwoven trees, which crossed one of the mountain-streams. "This land was not made for slaves. Look at these bulwarks of nature! Every mountainhead which forms this chain of hills is an impregnable rampart against invasion. If Baliol had possessed but half a heart, Edward might have returned even worse than Cæsar—without a cockle to decorate his helmet."

"Baliol has found the oblivion he incurred," returned Wallace; "his son, perhaps, may better deserve the sceptre of such a country. Let us cut the way, and he who merits the crown will soon appear to claim it."

"Then it will not be Edward Baliol!" rejoined Scrymgeour. "During the reign of his father I once carried a despatch to him from Scotland. He was then banqueting in all the luxuries of the English court; and such a voluptuary I never beheld! I left the scene of folly, only praying that so effeminate a prince might never disgrace the throne of our manly race of kings."

"If such be the tuition of our lords in the court of Edward—and wise is the policy for his own views!" observed Ker, "what can we expect from even the Bruce? They were ever a nobler race than the Baliol; but bad education and luxury will debase the most princely minds."

"Perhaps," said Wallace, "the young lion only sleeps! The time may come when both he and his father will rise from their lethargy, and throw themselves at once into the arms of Scotland. To stimulate the dormant patriotism of these two princes, is one great end of the victories I seek. None other than a brave king can bind the various interests of this distracted country into one; and, therefore, my heart turns towards the Bruces with most anxious hopes."

"For my part," cried Murray, "I have always thought the lady we will not woo we have no right to pretend to. If the Bruces will not be at the pains to snatch Scotland from drowning, I see no reason for making them a present of what will cost us many a wet jacket before we tug her from the waves. He that wins the day ought to wear the laurel: and so, once for all, I proclaim him king of good old Albin* who will have the glory of driving her oppressors beyond her dykes."

Wallace did not hear this last sentiment of Murray's, as it

* Albin was the ancient name of Scotland,

was spoken in a lowered voice in the ear of Kirkpatrick. "I perfectly agree with you," was that knight's reply; "and in the true Roman style, may the death of every Southron now in Scotland, and as many more as fate chooses to yield us, be the preliminary games of his coronation!"

Wallace, who heard this, turned to Kirkpatrick with a mild rebuke in his eye: "Balaam blessed when he meant to curse!" said he, "but some curse when they mean to bless. Such prayers are blasphemy. For, can we expect a blessing on our arms when all our invocations are for vengeance rather than victory?"

"Blood for blood is only justice!" returned Murray; "and how can you, as a Scot, and as a man, plead for the villains who have stabbed us to the heart?"

Wallace turned to him with a smile: "I will answer you, my valiant friend, by adopting your own figure. It is that these Southron wolves may not confound us with themselves that I wish to show in our conduct rather the generous ardour of the guardian of the fold, than the fierceness which equals them with the beasts of the desert. As we are men and Scots, let the burden of our prayers be, the preservation of our country, not the slaughter of our enemies! The one is an ambition with which angels may sympathise; the other, a horrible desire which speaks the nature of fiends."

"In some cases this may be," replied Sir Roger, a little reconciled to the argument, "but not in mine. My injury yet burns upon my cheek; and as nothing but the life-blood of Cressingham can quench it, I will listen no more to your doctrine till I am revenged. That done, I shall not forget your lesson."

"Generous Kirkpatrick!" exclaimed Wallace, "nothing that is really cruel can dwell with such candour. Say what you will, I can trust your heart after this moment."

They had crossed the river Ennerie, and were issuing from between its narrow ridge of hills, when Wallace, pointing to a rock which rose in solitary magnificence in the midst of a plain, exclaimed, "There is Dumbarton Castle!—that citadel holds the fetters of Scotland; and if we break them there, every minor link will easily give way."

The men uttered a shout of anticipated triumph at this sight; and proceeding, soon came in view of the fortifications which helmeted the rock. As they approached they dis-

covered that it had two summits, being in a manner cleft in twain ; the one side rising in a pyramidal form, while the other, of a more table-shape, sustained the ponderous buildings of the fortress.

It was dusk when the little army arrived in the rear of a close thicket which skirted the eastern dyke of the castle, and reached to a considerable length over the plain. On this spot Wallace rested his men ; and while they placed themselves under its covert till the appointed time of attack, he perceived through an opening in the wood the gleaming of soldiers' arms on the ramparts, and fires beginning to light on a lonely watch-tower, which crowned the pinnacle of the highest rock.

"Poor fools !" exclaimed Murray ; "like the rest of their brethren of clay they look abroad for evils, and prepare not for those which are even at their doors !"

"That beacon-fire," cried Scrymgeour, "shall light us to their chambers ; and for once we thank them for their providence."

"That beacon-fire," whispered Edwin to Wallace, "shall light me to honour. To-night, by your agreement, I shall call *you brother*, or lie dead on the summit of those walls !"

"Edwin," said Wallace, "act as you say ; and deserve not only to be called my brother, but to be the first patriot knight."

He then turned towards the lines, and giving orders to each division, directed them to seek repose on the surrounding heather till the moon should have sunk her tell-tale light in the waves.

CHAPTER XXI.

DUMBARTON ROCK.

ALL obeyed their commander and retired to rest. But the eyes of Edwin could not close ; his rapid mind anticipated the ascent of the walls of Dumbarton. But imagination suggested the difficulties attending so small a force assailing so formidable a garrison without some immediate knowledge of its relative situations. A thought struck him. He would mount that rock alone—he would seek to ascertain the place of Lord Mar's confinement, that not one life in Wallace's faithful band might be lost in a vague search.

"Ah ! my general," exclaimed he, "Edwin shall be the first to spring those ramparts—he shall tread that dangerous

path alone ; and when he has thus proved himself not unworthy of thy confidence he will return to lead thee to victory, and himself to honour by thy side ! ”

This fervent apostrophe was no sooner uttered than he stole from the thicket into which he had cast himself to repose. He looked towards the cliff ; its summit stood bright in the moonlight, but deep shadows lay beneath. “ God be my speed,” cried he, and wrapping himself in his plaid, so mixed its dark hues with herbage at the base of the rock that he made its circuit without having attracted observation.

The south side seemed the most easy of ascent, and by that he began his attempt. Having gained the height, he clambered behind a buttress, the shadow of which cast the wall into such obscurity that he crept safely through one of its crenelles, and dropping gently inwards alighted on his feet. Still keeping the shadowed side of the battlements, he passed undiscovered by the sentinels.

He soon arrived at the open square before the citadel : it was yet occupied by groups of officers, gaily walking to and fro. In hopes of gaining some information, he concealed himself behind a chest of arrows, and as they passed backwards and forwards, distinctly heard them jesting about divers fair dames of the country around. The conversation terminated in a debate, whether the indifference which their governor De Valence manifested to the beauties of the Countess of Mar were real or assumed. A thousand free remarks were made, and Edwin gathered sufficient from the discourse to understand that the earl and countess were treated severely, and confined in a large square tower in the cleft of the rock.

Having learnt all that he could expect, he speeded, under the friendly shadow, towards the other side of the citadel, and arrived just as the guard approached to relieve the sentinel of the northern postern. He laid himself close to the ground, and happily overheard the word of the night as it was given to the new watch. This providential circumstance saved his life.

Finding no mode of egress but by the postern at which the sentinel was stationed, or by attempting a passage through a small adjoining tower, the door of which stood open, he decided for the tower, and stole unobserved into it. Edwin found it full of spare arms, with two or three vacant couches, where he supposed the officers on guard occasionally reposed : several watch-cloaks lay on the floor. Throwing one of them

over his own shoulders he climbed to a large embrasure in the wall, and forcing himself through it, dropped to a declivity on the other side, which shelved down to the cliff, wherein he now saw the square tower.

He had scarcely lit on firm ground, when a sentinel, followed by two others with presented pikes, approached him, and demanded *the word*. "*Pembroke!*" was his reply. "Why leap the embrasure?" said one. "Why not enter the postern?" demanded another. The conversation of the officers had given a hint, on which he formed his answer. "Love seldom chooses even ways. I go on a message from a young ensign in the keep to one of the Scottish damsels in yonder tower. Delay me, and his vengeance will fall upon us all." "Good luck to you, my lad!" was their answer, and, with a lightened step, he hastened towards the tower.

Not deeming it safe to seek an interview with any of the earl's family, he crept along till he reached the high wall that blocks up egress from the north. He found this constructed of rock, and for the convenience of the guard a sloping platform from within led to the top of the wall. On the other side it was perpendicular. A solitary sentinel stood there; and how to pass him was Edwin's next device. To attack him would be desperate; being one of a chain of guards around the interior of the fortress, his voice need only be raised in the least to call a regiment to his assistance, and Edwin must be seized on the instant.

The adventurous youth bethought him of his former excuse; and remembering a flask of spirits which Ireland had put into his pouch on leaving Glenfinlass, he affected to be intoxicated, and staggering up to the man, accosted him in the character of a servant of the garrison.

The sentinel did not doubt the appearance of the boy, and Edwin holding out the flask, said that a pretty girl in the great tower had not only given him a long draught of the liquor, but had filled his bottle, that he might not lack amusement, while her companion was tying up a true lover's knot to send to his master in the garrison. The man believed Edwin's tale, and the more readily as he thrust the flask into his hand. "Do not spare it," cried he; "I shall get more where that came from."

The unsuspecting Southron soon drained the flask. Edwin complained of drowsiness. "I would go to the top of that

wall, and sleep," said he, "if any good-natured fellow would meanwhile wait for my pretty Scot!"

The half-inebriated Southron liked no better sport, and regardless of duty, he promised to draw nearer the tower, and bring from the fair messenger the expected token.

Having thus far gained his point, Edwin ascended the wall. A leap from this dizzy height was his only way to rejoin Wallace. To retread his footsteps through the fortress in safety would hardly be possible; and besides would leave him uninformed on the second object of his enterprise—to know the most vulnerable side of the fortress.

He threw himself along the summit of the wall as if to sleep. He looked down and saw nothing but the blackness of space.

But hope buoyed him, and turning his eyes towards the sentinel, he observed him to have arrived within a few paces of the square tower. This was Edwin's moment: grasping the projecting stone of the embattlement, he threw himself from its summit, and fell a fearful depth to the cliffs beneath.

Meanwhile Wallace, having seen his followers depart to their repose, reclined himself along a pile of moss-grown stones, which, in the days of Fingal, had covered the body of some valiant Morven chieftain. He fixed his eyes on the castle, and considered which point would be most assailable by the scaling-ladders. Every side seemed a precipice. The only place that seemed at all accessible was the side next the dyke behind which he lay. Here the ascent to the castellated part of the rock, because most perpendicular, was the least guarded with outworks; and by this he determined to make the attempt, as soon as the setting moon should involve the garrison in darkness.

While he yet mused, he thought he heard a swift though cautious footstep. He raised himself, and laying his hand on his sword, saw a figure advancing towards him.

"Who goes there?" demanded Wallace.

"A faithful Scot," was the reply.

Wallace recognised the voice of Edwin. "What has disturbed you? Why do you not take rest with the others?"

"That we may have the surer to-morrow?" replied the youth: "I am just returned from the summit of yonder rock."

"How!" interrupted Wallace; "have you scaled it alone, and are returned in safety? Intrepid, glorious boy! tell me for what purpose did you thus hazard your life?"

"I wished to learn its most pregnable part," replied Edwin, his heart beating with triumph at these encomiums from his commander; "and particularly where the good earl is confined, that we might make our attack directly to the point."

"And have you been successful?"

"I have," was his reply. "Lord Mar and his lady are kept in a square tower which stands in the cleft between the two summits of the rock. It is not only surrounded by embattled walls, but the space on which it stands is bulwarked at each end by a stone curtain of fifteen feet high, guarded by turrets full of armed men."

"And yet by that side you suppose we must ascend?" said Wallace.

"Certainly; for if you attempt it on the west we should have to scale the watch-tower cliff, and the ascent could only be gained in file. An auxiliary detachment to attack in flank might succeed there, but the passage being so narrow, would be too tedious for the whole party to arrive in time. Should we take the south we must cut through the whole garrison before we could reach the earl. And on this side, the morass lies too near the foot of the rock to admit an approach without the greatest danger. But on the north, where I descended, by wading through part of the Leven, and climbing from cliff to cliff, I have every hope you may succeed."

Edwin recounted the particulars of his progress through the fortress; and by the minuteness of his descriptions, enforced his arguments for the north to be the point assailed. Closing his narrative, he explained how he had escaped accident in a leap of so many feet. The wall was covered with ivy; he caught by its branches in his descent; and at last happily fell amongst a thick bed of furze. After this he clambered down the steep, and fording the Leven (there only knee-deep), now appeared before his general, elate in heart and bright in valour.

"The intrepidity of this action," returned Wallace, glowing with admiration at so noble a daring in so young a creature, "merits that every confidence should be placed in the result of your observations. Your safe return is a pledge of our design being approved. And when we go in the strength of heaven, who can doubt the issue? This night, when the Lord of battles puts that fortress into our hands, before the whole of our little army you shall receive that knighthood you have so richly deserved. Such shall be the reward of your virtue and your toil."

Wallace would now have sent him to repose, but animated by success he told his leader that he felt no want of sleep, and would rather take on him the office of arousing the other captains to their stations.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE FORTRESS.

KIRKPATRICK, Murray and Scrymgeour hastened to their commander, and in a few minutes all were under arms. Wallace briefly explained his altered plan of assault, and marshalling his men accordingly, led them in silence through the water, and along the beach, which lay between the rock and the Leven.

Meanwhile, Edwin led Lord Andrew with his followers and the Fraser men round by the western side to mount the watch-tower rock, and seize the few soldiers who kept the beacon. As a signal of having succeeded they were to smother the flame on the top of the tower, and thence descend towards the garrison, to meet Wallace before the prison of the Earl of Mar.

While the men of Lanark, with their eyes fixed on the burning beacon, watched the appointed signal for the attack, Wallace drew himself up almost parallel with the top of the great wall, which clasped the bases of the two hills. He listened, but no voice was to be heard in the garrison of all the legions he had so lately seen glittering on its battlements. It was an awful pause.

Now was the moment when Scotland was to make her first essay for freedom! Should it fail, ten thousand bolts of iron would be added to her chains! Should it succeed, liberty and happiness were the almost certain consequences.

He looked up, and fixing his eyes on the beacon-flame, thought he saw the figures of men pass before it—the next moment all was darkness. He sprang on the wall, and feeling by the touch of hands about his feet that his followers had already mounted their ladders, he grasped his sword, and leaped down on the ground within. In that moment he struck against the sentinel, who was just passing, and by the violence of the shock struck him to the earth; but the man, as he fell, catching Wallace round the waist, dragged him after him, and shouted "*Treason!*"

Several sentinels ran to the spot, the adjacent turrets emptied

themselves of their armed inhabitants, and all assaulted Wallace, just as he had extricated himself from the grasp of the prostrate soldier.

"Who are you?" demanded they.

"Your enemy," and the speaker fell at his feet with one stroke of his sword.

"Alarm!—treason!" resounded from the rest as they aimed their random strokes at the conquering chief. But he was now assisted by Ker, and several Lanarkmen, who were dealing about blows in the darkness, and strewed the ground with the dying and the dead.

One or two Southrons fled to arouse the garrison, and just as the whole of Wallace's men leaped the wall and rallied to his support, the inner ballium gate burst open, and a legion of foes, bearing torches, surrounded Wallace and his company. But his men stood firm with fixed pikes, receiving, without injury, the assault. Their weapons being longer than their enemy's, the Southrons, not aware of the circumstance, rushed upon their points, incurring the death they meant to give. Seeing their consequent disorder, Wallace ordered the pikes to be dropped, and his men to charge sword in hand. Terrible was now the havoc. Wallace fought in front, making a dreadful passage through the falling ranks, while the tremendous sweep of his sword, flashing in the intermitting light, warned the survivors where the avenging blade would next descend. It seemed as if the destroying angel himself were there, and with one blast of his desolating brand, had laid all in ruin. The platform was cleared, and the fallen torches, some half-extinguished, and others flaming on the ground, showed a few terrified wretches seeking safety in flight. The same lurid rays, casting a transitory light on the iron gratings of the great tower, informed Wallace that the conflict had drawn him to the prison of the earl.

"We are now near the end of this night's work!" cried he.

"Let us press forward to give freedom to the Earl of Mar!"

"Liberty and Lord Mar!" cried Kirkpatrick, rushing onwards. He was immediately followed by his own men, but not quick enough for his daring. The guard in the tower, hearing the outcry, issued from the flanking gates, and, surrounding him, took him prisoner.

"Men of Loch Doine," roared he with the voice of a lion, "rescue your leader!"

They hurried forward, with yells of defiance ; but the garrison turned out all its power, and, with De Valence at their head, pouring on Kirkpatrick's men, would have overpowered them had not Wallace and his sixty heroes cut a passage to them through the closing ranks.

Pikes struck against corslets, swords rung on helmets, and the ponderous battle-axe cleft the uplifted target in twain. The dripping hands of Kirkpatrick, as Wallace tore him from the enemy, proclaimed that he had bathed his vengeance. On being released, he shook his ensanguined arms. "The work speeds ! Now through the heart of the governor !"

Even while he spoke Wallace lost him again from his side ; and again, by the shouts of the Southrons, he learnt he must be taken. That cry was the death-knell of their own doom. It directed Wallace to the spot, and throwing himself and his brethren of Lanark into the midst of the band which held the prisoner, Kirkpatrick was again rescued. But to do this generous deed he had advanced further than he ought, and himself and his brave followers must have been slain had he not recoiled back, and covering their rear with the great tower, all who had the hardihood to approach, fell under the weight of the Scottish claymore.

Scrymgeour, at the head of the Loch Doine men, in vain attempted to reach this contending party ; and fearful of losing the royal standard, he was turning to make a valiant retreat, when Murray and Edwin rushed into the fray, uttering the inspiring slogan of "Wallace and freedom !" It was echoed by every Scot ; those that were flying returned ; they who sustained the conflict hailed the cry with braced sinews ; and the terrible thunder of the words struck a terror into De Valence's men which made them pause. The extinction of the beacon made them still more aghast.

On that short moment turned the crisis of their fate. Wallace cut his way forward through the dismayed Southrons, who, hearing the reiterated shouts of the fresh reinforcements, knew not whether its strength might not be thousands instead of hundreds, and, panic-struck, they became an easy prey to their enemies. Surrounded, mixed with their assailants, they knew not friends from foes, and they indiscriminately cut to right and left, wounding as many of their own men as of the Scots, and finally, after slaughtering half their companions, some few escaped through the small posterns of

the garrison, leaving the inner ballia gate entirely in possession of the foe.

The whole of the field being cleared, Wallace ordered the tower to be forced. A strong guard was still within, and, as the assailants drew near, every means were used to render their assaults abortive. As the Scots pressed to the main entrance, stones and heavy metals were thrown upon their heads; but they stood beneath the iron shower, till Wallace ordered them to drive a large felled tree, which lay on the ground, against the hinges of the door; it burst open, and the whole party rushed into the hall.

A short but decisive conflict took place.

"Wallace! Wallace!" cried the stentorian lungs of Kirkpatrick. In a moment Wallace was at his side, and found him wrestling with two men. A dagger was pointed at the life of the old knight, but Wallace laid the holder of it dead across the body of his intended victim; and catching the other assailant by the throat, threw him prostrate to the ground.

"Spare me, for the honour of knighthood!" cried the conquered.

"For my honour you shall die!" said Kirkpatrick. His sword was already at the heart of the Englishman. Wallace beat it back. "Kirkpatrick, he is my prisoner, and I give him life."

"You know not what you do," cried the old knight, struggling with Wallace. "This is De Valence!"

"Quarter!" reiterated the panting and hard-pressed earl. "Noble Wallace, my life! for I am wounded."

"Sooner take my own!" cried Kirkpatrick trying to wrench his hand from the grasp of his commander.

"Shame!" cried Wallace; "you must strike through me to kill any wounded man I hear cry for quarter! Release the earl for your own honour."

"Our safety lies in his destruction!" cried Kirkpatrick, and, enraged at opposition, he thrust his commander (little expecting such an action) from off the body of the earl. De Valence seized his advantage, and catching Kirkpatrick, overthrew him, and by a sudden spring, turning quickly on Wallace, struck his dagger into his side. All this was done in an instant. Wallace did not fall, but staggering, with the weapon sticking in his wound, he was so surprised by the baseness of the deed, he could not give the alarm till its perpetrator had disappeared.

The flying earl took his course through a narrow passage between the works, and issued safely at one of the outer ballium gates and thence he made his escape in a fisher's boat across the Clyde.

Meanwhile, Wallace, having recovered himself, just as the Scots brought in lighted torches from the lower apartments of the tower, saw Sir Roger Kirkpatrick leaning sternly on his sword, and Edwin coming forward in garments too nearly the hue of his own. Andrew Murray stood already by his side. Wallace's hand was upon the hilt of the dagger which the ungrateful De Valence had left in his breast. "You are wounded! you are slain!" cried Murray in a voice of consternation. Edwin stood motionless with horror.

"That dagger!" exclaimed Scrymgeour—

"Has done nothing," replied Wallace, "but let me a little more blood." As he spoke he drew it out, and thrusting the corner of his scarf into his bosom, staunched the wound.

"So is your mercy rewarded!" exclaimed Kirkpatrick.

"So am I true to a soldier's duty," returned Wallace, "though De Valence is a traitor to his!"

"You treated him as a man," replied Kirkpatrick, "but now you find him a treacherous fiend!"

"Your eagerness, my brave friend," returned Wallace, "has lost him as a prisoner. If not for humanity or honour, for policy's sake, we ought to have spared his life, and detained him as an hostage for our countrymen in England. But let us not abuse our time discoursing on a coward. He is gone, the fortress is ours, and our first measure must be to guard it from surprise."

As he spoke, his eyes fell upon Edwin. "Brave youth," cried he, "you, at the imminent risk of your own life, explored these heights that you might render our ascent more sure; you who have fought like a young lion in this unequal contest! here in the face of all your valiant comrades, receive that knighthood which rather derives lustre from your virtues than gives additional consequence to your name."

Edwin bent his knee, and Wallace giving him the hallowed accolade,* the young knight rose with glowing countenance. Scrymgeour presented him with the knightly girdle, which he unbraced from his own loins, and while the happy boy received the sword to which it was attached, he exclaimed

*Accolade, the three strokes of the sword given in knighthood.

with animation, "While I follow the example before my eyes, I shall never draw this in an unjust cause, nor ever sheath it in a just one."

"Go, then," returned Wallace, smiling his approval of this sentiment, "while work is to be done I will keep my knight to the toil; go, and with twenty men of Lanark, guard the wall by which we ascended."

Edwin disappeared, and Wallace, having despatched detachments to occupy other parts of the garrison, took a torch in his hand and, turning to Murray, proposed seeking the Earl of Mar. Lord Andrew was soon at the iron door which led from the hall to the principal stairs.

"We must have our friendly battering-ram here," cried he; "a close prisoner do they indeed keep my uncle when even the inner doors are bolted on him."

The men dragged the tree forward, and striking it against the iron, it burst open with the noise of thunder. Shrieks from within followed the sound. The women of Lady Mar, not knowing what to suppose during the uproar of the conflict, now, hearing the door forced, expected nothing less than that some new enemies were advancing, and, giving themselves up to despair, they flew into the room where the countess sat in equal though less clamorous terror.

At the shouts of the Scots, when they began the attack, the earl had started from his couch. "That is not peace!" said he; "there is some surprise!"

"Alas, from whom?" returned Lady Mar; "who would venture to attack a fortress like this?"

The cry was repeated.

"It is the slogan of Sir William Wallace!" cried he; "I shall be free! O! for a sword! Hear, hear!"

As the shouts redoubled, and drew nearer the tower, the impatience of the earl could not be restrained. Hope and eagerness seemed to have new-strung every nerve. While, unarmed as he was, he rushed from the apartment and hurried down the stairs which led to the iron door. He found it so firmly fastened he could not move it. Again he ascended to his terrified wife, who, conscious how little obligation Wallace owed to her, perhaps dreaded even more to see her husband's hopes realised than to find herself yet more rigidly the prisoner of De Valence.

"Joanna!" cried he, "the arm of God is with us. My

prayers are heard, Scotland will yet be free. Hear those groans—those shouts. Victory! victory!”

As he thus echoed the cry of triumph uttered by the Scots, the foundations of the building shook, and Lady Mar, almost insensible with terror, received the exhausted body of her husband into her arms; he fainted from the transport his weakened frame was unable to bear. Soon after this the stair-door was forced, and the panic-struck women ran shrieking into the room to their mistress.

The countess, pale and motionless, supported his head on her bosom. Guided by the noise, Lord Andrew flew into the room, and rushing towards his uncle, fell at his feet. “Liberty! liberty!” was all he could say. His words pierced the ear of the earl like a voice from heaven, and looking up, without a word, he threw his arms round the neck of his nephew.

Tears relieved the contending feelings of the countess; and the earl, gazing round to seek the leader of the band, saw Wallace enter with triumph in his eyes.

The next instant he held Wallace to his breast, and remembering all that he had lost for his sake since they parted, he burst into tears. “Wallace, my preserver; thou victim for Scotland and for me—or rather thou chosen of heaven! who, by the sacrifice of all thou didst hold dear on earth, art made a blessing to thy country, receive my thanks and my heart.”

Wallace felt all in his soul which the earl meant to imply; and when he raised himself, and replied to the acknowledgments of the countess, it was with a serene and glowing countenance.

She, when she had glanced from the eager entrance and action of her nephew to the advancing hero, looked as Venus did when she beheld the god of war rise from a field of blood. She started at the appearance of Wallace; but it was not his garments dropping gore, nor the blood-stained falchion in his hand, that caused the new sensation, it was the figure breathing youth and manhood—it was the face, where every noble passion of the heart had stamped themselves on his perfect features—it was his air, where majesty and sweet entrancing grace mingled in manly union. They were all these that struck at once upon the sight of Lady Mar, and made her exclaim within herself, “This is a wonder of a man! This is the hero that is to humble Edward!—to bless—whom?” was her thought. “Oh, no woman! Let him be a creature enshrined and holy, for no female heart to dare to love!”

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE GREAT TOWER.

WHEN Wallace withdrew, Lady Mar, who had detained Murray, whispered to him that she should like to be present at the planting of the standard. Lord Mar declared his willingness to accompany her to the spot. Murray hesitated. "It will be impossible for my aunt to go; the hall below and the ground before the tower are covered with slain."

"Let them be cleared away!" cried she; "for I cannot consent to be deprived of a spectacle so honourable to my country."

Murray regarded the indifference with which she gave this order with amazement. "To do that, madam," said he, "is beyond my power; the whole ceremony of the colours would be completed before I could clear the earth of half its load. I will seek a passage for you by some other way."

Before the earl could make a remark, Murray had disappeared, and after exploring the lower part of the tower met Sir Roger Kirkpatrick issuing from a small door, which he had hitherto overlooked. It led through the ballium to the platform before the citadel. Lord Andrew returned to his uncle and aunt, and informing them of this discovery, gave his arm to Lord Mar, while Kirkpatrick led forward the countess. At this moment the sun rose behind the purple summit of Ben Lomond.

When they approached the citadel, Wallace and Sir Alexander Scrymgeour had just gained its summit. The standard of Edward was yet flying. Wallace looked at it for a moment, then laying his hand on the staff, "Down, thou red dragon," cried he, "and learn to bow before the Giver of all victory!" Even while speaking he rent it from the roof, and, casting it over the battlements, planted the Lion of Scotland in its stead.

"O! God!" cried he, still grasping the staff and looking up to heaven, "we got not this in possession through our own might, but Thy right hand and the light of Thy countenance overthrew the enemy! Thine the conquest, Thine the glory!"

The colours fixed, Wallace and his brave colleague descended the tower. The countess rose as the chiefs drew near. Lord Mar took his friend by the hand, with a gratulation in his eyes that was unutterable: his lady spoke, hardly conscious of what she said; and Wallace, after a few minutes' discourse,

proposed to the earl to retire with Lady Mar into the citadel, where she would be more suitably lodged than in their late prison. Lord Mar was obeying this movement, when suddenly stopping, he exclaimed,—“But where is that wondrous boy? your pilot over these perilous rocks? let me give him a soldier’s thanks!”

Happy at so grateful a demand, Wallace beckoned Edwin, who, just relieved from his guard, was standing at some distance. “Here,” said he, “is my knight of fifteen! for last night he proved himself more worthy of his spurs than many a man who has received them from a king.”

“He shall wear those of a king,” rejoined the Lord Mar, unbuckling from his feet a pair of golden spurs; “these were fastened on my heels by our great king Alexander at the battle of Largs. I had intended them for my only son, but the first knight in the cause of rescued Scotland is the son of my heart and soul!”

As he spoke, he would have pressed the young hero to his breast, but Edwin, trembling with emotion, slid down upon his knees, and, clasping the earl’s hand, said in a hardly audible voice, “Receive and pardon the truant son of your sister Ruthven!”

“What!” exclaimed the veteran, “is it Edwin Ruthven that has brought me this weight of honour? Come to my arms, thou dearest child of my dearest Janet?”

The uncle and nephew were folded in each other’s embrace. Lady Mar wept; and Wallace turned away towards the battlements. Edwin murmured a short explanation in the ear of his uncle, and then rising, allowed his cousin Murray to buckle the royal spurs on his feet. The rite over, he kissed Lord Andrew’s hand in token of acknowledgment, and called on Sir William Wallace to bless the new honours conferred on his knight.

Wallace turned towards Edwin with a smile which partook more of heaven than earth. “Have we not performed our mutual promises?” said he; “I brought you to the spot where you were to reveal your name, and you have declared it to me by the voice of glory! Come, then, my brother, let us leave your uncle awhile to seek his repose.”

As he spoke, he bowed to the countess; and Edwin joyfully receiving his arm, they walked together towards the eastern postern.

Agitated with the delightful surprise of thus meeting his favourite sister's son (whom he had never seen since his infancy), and exhausted by the variety of his late emotions, the earl readily acquiesced in a proposal for rest, and proceeded to the citadel.

The countess had other attractions : lingering at the side of the rough knight of Torthorald, she looked back, and when she saw the object of her gaze disappear through the gates she sighed, and turning to her conductor, walked by him in silence, till they joined her husband in the hall of the keep. Murray led the way into the apartments lately occupied by De Valence. They were furnished with all the luxury of a Southron nobleman. Lady Mar cast her eyes around the splendid chamber, and seated herself on one of its tapestried couches. The earl, not marking whether it were silk or rushes, placed himself beside her. Murray drew a stool towards them, while Kirkpatrick, tired of his gallant duty, abruptly took his leave.

"My dear Andrew," said the earl, "in the midst of this proud rejoicing there is yet a canker at my heart. Tell me, that when my beloved Helen disappeared in the tumult at Bothwell, she was under your protection ?"

"She was," replied Murray ; "and I thank the holy Saint Fillan she is now in the sanctuary of his church."

Murray then recounted to his relieved uncle every event, from the moment of his withdrawing behind the arras, to that of his confiding the English soldier with the iron box to the care of the prior. Lord Mar sighed heavily when he spoke of that mysterious casket. "Whatever it contain," said he, "it has drawn after it much evil and much good. The domestic peace of Wallace was ruined by it, and the spirit which now restores Scotland to herself was raised by his wrongs !"

"But tell me," added he, "do you think my daughter safe so near a garrison of the enemy ?"

"Surely, my lord," cried the countess, too well remembering the enthusiasm with which Helen had regarded even the unknown Wallace ; "surely you would not bring that tender child into a scene like this ! Rather send a messenger to convey her secretly to Thirlestane ; at that distance she will be safe, and under the powerful protection of her grandfather."

The earl acquiesced in her opinion ; and saying he would consult with Wallace about the securest mode of travel for his daughter, again turned to Lord Andrew to learn further

of their late proceedings. But the countess, still uneasy, once more interrupted him.

"Alas! my lord, what would you do? His generous zeal will offer to go in person for your daughter. We know not what dangers he might then incur, and surely the champion of Scotland is not to be thrown into peril for any domestic concern! If you really feel the weight of the evils into which you have plunged Sir William Wallace, do not increase it by even hinting to him the present subject of your anxiety."

"My aunt is an oracle!" resumed Murray. "Allow me to be the happy knight that is to bear the surrender of Dumbarton to my sweet cousin. Prevail on Wallace to remain in this garrison till I return, and then full tilt for the walls of old Stirling, and the downfall of Hughie Cressingham!"

Both the countess and the earl were pleased with this arrangement. The latter retired into an inner chamber to repose, and the former desired Lord Andrew to inform Wallace that she should expect to be honoured with his presence at noon, to partake of such fare as the garrison afforded. Murray learnt that Wallace was gone towards the tower. He followed him thither, and saw the chief standing in the midst of the slain.

"This is a sorry sight!" said he to Murray, "but it shall not long lie thus exposed. I have just ordered that these sad wrecks of human strife may be lowered into the Clyde; its rushing stream will soon carry them to a quiet grave beneath yon peaceful sea." His own dead, amounting to no more than fifteen, were to be buried at the foot of the rock, a prisoner in the castle having described steps in the cliff by which the solemnity should easily be performed.

"But why," cried Lord Andrew, "do you take any thought about our enemies? Leave them where they are, and the eagles of our mountains will soon find them graves."

"For shame, Murray!" was the reply of Wallace; "they are dead, and our enemies no more. They are men like ourselves, and shall we deny them a place in that earth whence we all sprung? We war not with human nature: are we not rather the assertors of her rights?"

"I know," replied Lord Andrew, blushing, "that I am often the assertor of my own folly, and I do not know how you will forgive my inconsiderate impertinence."

"Because it was inconsiderate," replied Wallace. "Inhumanity is too stern a guest to live in such a breast as yours."

"If I ever give her quarters," replied Murray, "I should most woefully disgrace the companion she would meet there. Next to the honour of Scotland, my cousin Helen is the goddess of my idolatry; and she would forswear my love and kindred could she believe me capable of feeling otherwise than in unison with Sir William Wallace."

Wallace looked towards him with a benign pleasure in his countenance—"Your cousin does me honour."

"Ah!" cried Murray, lowering his gay tone to one of softer expression; "if you knew all the goodness, all the nobleness that dwells in her gentle heart, you would indeed esteem her—you would love her as I do."

The blood fled from the cheek of Wallace. "Not as you do, Murray; I can no more love woman as you love her. Such scenes as these," cried he, turning to the mangled bodies which the men were now carrying away to the precipice of the Clyde, "have divorced woman's love from my heart. I am all my country's, or I am nothing."

When all the slain were lowered to their last beds, a young priest, who came in the company of Scrymgeour, gave the funeral benediction both to the departed in the waves, and those whom the shore had received. The rites over, Murray again drew near to Wallace, and delivered his aunt's message. "I shall obey her commands," returned he; "but first we must visit our wounded prisoners in the tower."

Ireland threw open the door which led into the hall, and there on the ground, on pallets of straw, lay most of the wounded Southrons. Some of their dimmed eyes had discerned their preserver when he discovered them expiring on the rock, and on sight of him now they uttered such a piercing cry of gratitude that, surprised, he stood for a moment. In that moment five or six of the poor wretches crawled to his feet and kissed the edge of his plaid.

"Not to me, not to me!" exclaimed Wallace; "I am a soldier like yourselves. I have only acted a soldier's part, but I am a soldier of freedom, you of a tyrant, who seeks to enslave the world. This makes the difference between us; this lays you at my feet when I would more willingly receive you to my arms as brothers in one generous cause."

"We are yours," was the answering exclamation. A few only remained silent. With many kind expressions of acceptance, Wallace disengaged himself from those who clung around

him, and then moved towards the sick, who seemed too ill to speak. While repeating the same consolatory language to them, he particularly observed an old man who was lying between two young ones, and still kept a profound silence. His rough features were marked with many a scar, but there was a meek resignation in his face that powerfully struck Wallace. When the chief drew near, the veteran raised himself on his arm, and bowed his head with a respectful air. Wallace stopped. "You are an Englishman?"

"I am, sir, and I have no services to offer you. These two young men on each side of me are my sons. Their brother I lost last night in the conflict. To-day, by your mercy, not only my life is preserved, but my two remaining children also. Yet I am an Englishman, and I cannot be grateful at the expense of my allegiance."

"Nor would I require it of you," returned Wallace; "these brave Welsh and Irish were brought hither by the invader who subjugates their countries; they owe him no duty. But you are a free subject of England; he that is a tyrant over others can only be a king to you; he must be the guardian of your laws, the defender of your liberties, or his sceptre falls. Having sworn to follow a sovereign so plighted, I am not severe enough to condemn you, because, misled by that phantom which he calls glory, you have suffered him to betray you into unjust conquests."

"Once I have been so misled," returned the old man, "but I never will again. Fifty years I have fought under the British standard in Normandy and in Palestine; and now in my old age, with four sons, I followed the armies of my sovereign into Scotland. My eldest I lost in the plains of Dunbar. My second fell last night, and my two youngest are now by my side. You have saved them and me. What can I do? Not, as your noble self says, forswear my country; but this I swear, and in the oath do you, my sons, join, never to raise our swords against England; and, with like faith, never to lift an arm against Sir William Wallace or the cause of injured Scotland!"

"To this we also subjoin!" cried several other men, who comprised the whole of the English prisoners.

"Noble people!" cried Wallace, "why have you not a king worthy of you?"

"And yet," observed Kirkpatrick, in a surly tone, "Hesel-

rigge was one of these people ! ” Wallace turned upon him with a look of so tremendous a meaning, that he fell back a few paces, muttering curses, but on whom could not be heard.

“ That man would arouse the tiger in our lion-hearted chief ! ” whispered Scrymgeour to Murray.

“ Ay,” returned Lord Andrew ; “ but the royal spirit keeps the beast in awe :—see how coweringly that bold brow now bows before it ! ”

Wallace marked the impression his glance had made, but where he had struck, being unwilling to pierce also, he dispelled the thunder from his countenance, and once more looking on Sir Roger with a frank serenity : “ Come,” said he, “ my good knight, you must not be more tenacious for William Wallace than he is for himself ! While he possesses such a zealous friend as Kirkpatrick of Torthorald he need not now fear the arms of a thousand Heselrigges.”

“ No, nor of Edward’s either,” cried Kirkpatrick, once more looking boldly up, and shaking his broad claymore. “ My thistle has a point to sting all to the death who would pass between this arm and my leader’s breast.”

“ May heaven long preserve the valiant Wallace ! ” was the prayer of every feeble voice, as he left the hall to visit his own wounded in an upper chamber. The interview was short and satisfactory. “ Ah ! sir,” cried one of them, “ when I see you I feel as if I beheld the very soul of my country, or its guardian angel, standing before me—it fills me with courage and comfort ! ”

“ You see an honest Scot standing before you, my good Duncan,” replied Wallace ; “ and that is no mean personage, for it is one who knows no use of his life, but as it fulfils his duty to his country ! ”

“ Oh, that the sound of that voice could penetrate to every ear in Scotland ! ” rejoined the soldier ; “ it would be more than the call of the trumpet to bring them to the field ! ”

“ And from the summit of this rock many have already heard it, and more shall be aroused ! ” cried Murray, returning from the door, to which one of his men had beckoned him : “ Here is a man come to announce that Malcolm, Earl of Lennox, passing by the foot of this rock, saw the Scottish standard flying from its citadel ; and, as overjoyed as amazed at the sight, he sends to request the confidence of being admitted.”

"Let me bring him hither!" interrupted Kirkpatrick, "he is brave as the day, and will be a noble auxiliary."

"Every true Scot must be welcome to these walls," returned Wallace.

With all the pride of a freeman and a victor, Sir Roger descended the height. Lennox advanced to meet him. "What is it I see? Sir Roger Kirkpatrick master of this citadel, and our king's colours flying from its towers? Where is Earl de Valence? Where is the English garrison?"

"The English garrison," replied Kirkpatrick, "are now twelve hundred men beneath the waters of the Clyde. De Valence is fled; and this fortress manned with a few hardy Scots, shall sink into yon waves ere it again bear the English dragon on its walls."

"And you, noble knight," cried Lennox, "have achieved all this?"

"No," replied Kirkpatrick; "I am but a follower of the man who has struck the blow. Sir William Wallace of Elderslie is our chief; and with the power of his virtues he subdues not only friends but enemies to his command."

He then exultingly narrated the happy events of the last four-and-twenty hours. The earl listened with wonder and joy. "What!" cried he, "so noble a plan for Scotland, and I ignorant of it? I, that have not waked day nor night, for many a month, without thinking or dreaming of some enterprise to free my country, and behold it is achieved in a moment! Lead me to your chief, for he shall be mine, too: he shall command Malcolm Lennox and all his clan."

Kirkpatrick gladly turned to obey him; and they mounted the ascent together. Within the barbican-gate stood Wallace with Scrymgeour and Murray. The earl knew Scrymgeour well, having often seen him in the field as hereditary standard-bearer of the kingdom; of the persons of the others he was ignorant.

"There is Wallace!" exclaimed Kirkpatrick.

"Not one of those very young men?" interrogated the earl.

"Even so," was the answer of the knight; "but his is the youth of the brave son of Ammon; grey beards are glad to bow before his golden locks, for beneath them is wisdom."

As he spoke they entered the barbican, and Wallace advanced to meet his guest.

"Earl," said he, "you are welcome to Dumbarton Castle."

"Bravest of my countrymen!" returned Lennox, "receive the gratitude of a loyal heart; accept my services, my arms, my men: my all I devote to Scotland and the great cause."

Wallace for a moment did not answer; but warmly straining the earl to his breast said, as he released him, "Such support will give sinews to our power. A few months, and with the blessing of that arm which has already mowed down the ranks which opposed us, we shall see Scotland at liberty."

"And may heaven, brave Wallace!" exclaimed Lennox, "grant us thine arm to wield its scythe! But how have you accomplished this? How have your few overthrown this English host?"

"He strikes home, when right points his sword," replied Wallace; "the injuries of Scotland were my guide, and justice my companion. We feared nothing, for God was with us; and in His might we conquered."

"And shall yet conquer!" cried Lennox, kindling with the enthusiasm that blazed from the eyes of Wallace. "I feel the strength of our cause; and from this hour I devote myself to assert it or to die."

"Not to die, my noble lord," said Murray; "we have yet many an eve to dance over the buried fetters of Scotland. And, as a beginning of our jollities, I must remind our leader that my aunt's board awaits him."

Lord Lennox understood from this address it was the brave Murray who spoke to him; for he had heard sufficient from Sir Roger Kirkpatrick to explain how the Countess of Mar and her patriot husband came within those walls.

The countess, having arrayed herself to receive her deliverer, awaited the hour of his arrival with an emotion at her heart which made it bound against her bosom, when she saw the object of her splendid toil advancing. All others were lost to her impatient eyes; and hastily rising from the window as the chiefs entered the porch, she crossed the room to meet them at the door.

The Earl of Lennox stood amazed at sight of so much beauty and splendour in such a scene. Lady Mar had hardly attained her thirty-fifth year: but from the graces of her person, and the address with which she set forth all her charms, the gazer found it impossible to suppose her more than three or four and twenty. Thus happily formed by nature, and habited in a suit of velvet, overlaid with Cyprus-work of

gold, blazing with jewels about her head, and her feet clad with silver-fretted sandals, Lennox thought she looked more like some triumphant queen than a wife who had so lately shared captivity with an outlawed husband. Murray started at such unexpected magnificence in his aunt. But Wallace scarcely observed it was anything unusual; and bowing to her, presented the Earl of Lennox. She smiled; and saying a few words of welcome to the earl, gave her hand to Wallace to lead her back into the chamber.

Lord Mar had risen from his seat; and leaning on his sword (for his warlike arm refused any other staff), stood up on their entrance. At sight of Lord Lennox he uttered an exclamation of glad surprise. Lennox embraced him. "I, too, am come to enlist under the banners of this young Leonidas."

"God armeth the patriot," was all the reply that Mar made, while he shook him by the hand.

"I have four hundred stout Lennox-men," continued the earl, "who by to-morrow's eve shall be ready to follow our leader to the very borders."

"Not so soon," interrupted the countess; "our deliverer needs repose."

"I thank your benevolence, Lady Mar," returned Wallace; "but the issue of last night, and the sight of Lord Lennox this day, with the promise of so great a support, are such aliments that—we must go forward."

"Ay, to be sure," joined Kirkpatrick; "Dumbarton was not taken during our sleep; and if we stay loitering here, the devil that holds Stirling Castle may follow the scent of De Valence and so I lose my prey!"

"What?" cried the countess, "and is my lord to be left again to his enemies? Sir William Wallace, I should have thought——"

"Everything, madam," rejoined he, "that is demonstrative of my devotion to your venerable lord! But with a brave garrison, I hope you will consider him safe here until a wider range of security be won to enable you to retire to Braemar."

The sewer now announced the board in the hall; and the countess leading the way, reluctantly gave her hand to the Earl of Lennox. Lord Mar leaned on the arm of Wallace, who was followed by Edwin and the other chieftains.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE CITADEL.

DURING the repast the countess often fixed her gaze on the countenance of the heroic Wallace. His helmet was now laid aside; and the corslet unbuckled from his breast, disclosing the symmetry of his fine form, left its graceful movements to be displayed by the flexible folds of his tartan vest. Was it the formidable Wallace she looked on, bathed in the blood of Heselrigge, and breathing vengeance against the adherents of the tyrant Edward? It was, then, the enemy of her kinsmen of the house of Cummin! It was the man for whom her husband had embraced so many dangers! whom she had denounced and betrayed to the hazard of an ignominious death! But where now was the fierce rebel—the ruiner of her peace—the outlaw whom she had wished in his grave?

The last idea was distraction. She could have fallen at his feet, and implored his pity and forgiveness. Even as the wish sprung in her mind, she asked herself—“Did he know all, could he pardon such a weight of injuries?” She cast her eyes upon his face. The mildness of heaven was there; and the peace, too, she might have thought, had not his eye carried a sadness in its look, which told that something dire and sorrowful was buried deep within. At that moment Wallace addressed a few words to her, but she knew not what they were; her soul was in tumults, which seemed to wrap all her senses in a trance.

The unconscious object of these emotions bowed to her inarticulate reply, supposing that the mingling voices of others had made him hear hers indistinctly.

Lady Mar found her agitation so inexplicable, that feeling it impossible to remain longer without giving way to a burst of tears, she rose from her seat, and forcing a smile with her curtsy to the company, left the room.

On gaining the upper apartment, she threw herself along the nearest couch, and exclaimed, “What is this within me? How does my soul seem to pour itself out to this man! Hardly twelve hours have I seen this William Wallace, and yet my very being is now lost in his!”

She covered her face with her handkerchief, but no tears now started to be wiped away. The fire in her veins dried

their source, and with burning blushes she rose from her seat. "Why didst thou come here, Wallace, to rob me of my peace? O! why did I ever look on that face?—or rather, blessed saints!" cried she, clasping her hands in wild passion, "why did I ever shackle this hand?—why did I ever render such a sacrifice necessary! Wallace is now free; had I been free?—But wretch, wretch, wretch;—I could tear out this betrayed heart!—I could trample on that of the infatuating husband that made me such a slave!" She gasped for breath, and reclined her beating temples against the couch.

She was now silent; but thoughts not less intense, not less fraught with self-reproach, occupied her mind. Should this god of her idolatry ever discover that it was her information which had sent Earl de Valence's men to surround him in the mountains; that at Bothwell she had betrayed the cause on which he had set his life, she felt that moment would be her last. For now, to sate her eyes with him, to hear his voice, to receive his smiles, seemed to her a joy she could only surrender with existence. What, then, was the prospect of so soon losing him, even to crown himself with honour, but to her a living death?

To defer his departure was all her hope; and fearful that his restless valour might urge him to accompany Murray in his convoy of Helen to the Tweed, she determined to persuade her nephew to set off without the knowledge of his general. She did not allow that it was the youthful beauty of her daughter-in-law, which she feared; even to herself she cloaked her alarm under the plausible excuse of care for the chieftain's safety. Composed by this mental arrangement, her features became smooth, and with a sedate air she received her lord and his friends when they soon after entered the chamber.

But the object of her wishes did not appear. Wallace had taken Lord Lennox to view the dispositions of the fortress. Ill satisfied as she was with his absence, she did not fail to turn it to advantage; and while her lord and his friends were examining a draft of Scotland, she took Lord Andrew aside to converse with him on the subject now nearest to her heart.

"It certainly belongs to me alone to protect Helen to the Tweed, if there she must go," returned Murray: "but I cannot comprehend why I am to lead my fair cousin such a pilgrimage. She is not afraid of heroes! you are safe in Dumbarton, and why not bring her here also?"

“Not for worlds!” exclaimed the countess, thrown off her guard. Murray looked at her with surprise. It recalled her to self-possession, and she resumed: “So lovely a creature in this castle would be a dangerous magnet. You must have known that it was the hope of obtaining her which attracted Lord Soulis and Earl de Valence to Bothwell. The whole castle rung with the quarrel of these two lords upon her account when you so fortunately effected her escape. Should it be known that she is here, the same desire of obtaining her would give double excitement to De Valence to recover the place; and the consequences who can answer for?”

By this argument Murray was persuaded to relinquish the idea of conveying Helen to Dumbarton; but remembering what Wallace had said respecting the safety of a religious sanctuary, he advised that she should be left at St. Fillan’s till the cause of Scotland might be more firmly established. “Send a messenger to inform her of the rescue of Dumbarton, and of your and my uncle’s health,” continued he, “and that will be sufficient to make her happy.”

That she was not to be thrown in Wallace’s way satisfied Lady Mar; and she approved Murray’s decision. Relieved from apprehension, her face became again dressed in smiles, and she rose to welcome the re-entrance of Wallace with the Earl of Lennox.

Absorbed in one thought, every charm she possessed was directed to the same point. She played finely on the lute and sung with all the grace of her country. What gentle heart was not to be affected by music? She determined it should be one of the spells by which she meant to attract Wallace. She took up a lute, and touching it with exquisite delicacy, breathed the most pathetic air her memory could dictate.

“If on the heath she moved, her breast was whiter than the down of Cana;
If on the sea-beat shore, than the foam of the rolling ocean.
Her eyes were two stars of light. Her face was heaven’s bow in showers.
Her dark hair flowed around it, like the streaming clouds.
Thou wert the dweller of souls, white-handed Strinadona!”

Wallace rose from his chair, which had been placed near her. She had designed that these tender words of the bard of Morven should suggest to her hearer the observation of her own beauties. But he saw in them only the lovely *dweller of his own soul*; and walking towards a window, stood there with his eyes fixed on the descending sun. “So hath set

all my joys. So is life to me, a world without a sun,—cold, cold, and charmless!”

The countess vainly believed that some sensibility advantageous to her new passion had caused the agitation with which she saw him depart from her side; and, intoxicated with the idea, she ran through many a melodious descant, till touching on the first strains of *Thusa ha measg na reultan mor*, she saw Wallace start from his contemplative position, and with a pale countenance leave the room. There was something in this abruptness which excited the alarm of the Earl of Lennox, who had also been listening to the songs; he rose instantly, and overtaking the chief at the threshold, inquired what was the matter? “Nothing,” answered Wallace, forcing a smile, “but music displeases me.” With this reply he disappeared. The excuse seemed strange, but it was true; for her whose notes were to him sweeter than the thrush was silent in the grave! He should no more see her *white hand* upon the lute; no more behold that bosom, brighter than *foam upon the wave*, heave in tender transport at his applause. What, then, was music to him? A soulless sound, or a direful knell, to recall the remembrance of all he had lost.

Such were his thoughts when the words of *Thusa ha measg* rung from Lady Mar’s voice. Those were the strains which Halbert used to breathe from his harp to call his Marion to her slumbers—those were the strains with which that faithful servant had announced that she slept to wake no more!

What wonder, then, that Wallace fled from the apartment, and buried himself, and his aroused grief, amid the distant solitudes of the beacon-hill.

Edwin had at intervals cast a sidelong glance upon the changing complexion of his commander; and no sooner did he see him hurry from the room, than he also stole out of the apartment.

After seeking the object of his anxiety for a long time without avail, he was returning on his steps, when, attracted by the splendour of the moon silvering the beacon-hill, he ascended, once at least to tread that acclivity in light which he had so miraculously passed in darkness. Scarce a zephyr fanned the air. He moved on till a deep sigh arrested him. He stopped and listened: it was repeated again and again. He gently drew near, and saw a human figure reclining on the ground. Edwin no longer doubted having found the object

of his search. He walked forward. Again the figure sighed ; but with a depth so full of piercing woe, that Edwin hesitated.

"Who goes there ?" exclaimed Wallace, starting on his feet.

"Edwin," returned the youth. "I feared something wrong had happened when I saw you look so sad, and leave the room abruptly."

Wallace seated himself on a stone, and leaned his hand upon the hilt of his sword. "No new evil has befallen me, Edwin ; but there is such a thing as remembrance, that stabs deeper than the dagger's point."

"What remembrance can wound you ? The abbot of St. Columba has often told me that memory is a balm to every ill with the good ; and have not you been good to all ? The benefactor, the preserver of thousands ! Surely if man can be happy, it must be Sir William Wallace !"

"And so I am, my Edwin, when I contemplate the end. But, in the interval, with all thy sweet philosophy, is it not written here 'that man was made to mourn' ? Doubly I mourn, doubly am I bereaved ; for, had it not been for an enemy, I might have been a father ; I might have lived to have gloried in a son like thee ; I might have seen my wedded angel clasp such a blessing to her bosom ; but now, both are cold in clay ! These are the recollections which sometimes draw tears. And do not believe, brother of my soul, that they disgrace my manhood. The Son of God wept over the tomb of His friend ; and shall I deny a few tears over the grave of my wife and child ?"

Edwin sobbed aloud. "No son could love you dearer than I do. Ah ! let my affection teach you to forget you have lost a child. I will replace all to you but your Marion ; and her, the pitying Son of Mary will restore to you in the kingdom of heaven."

Wallace looked steadfastly at the young preacher. "'Out of the mouths of babes we shall hear wisdom !' Thine, dear Edwin, I will lay to heart. Thou shalt comfort me when my hermit-soul shuts out all the world besides."

"Then I am indeed your brother !" cried the youth ; "admit me but to your heart, and no fraternal, no filial tie, shall be more strongly linked than mine."

"What tender affections I can spare from those resplendent regions," answered Wallace, pointing to the skies, "are thine. The fervours of my soul are Scotland's, or I die. But thou

art too young to understand all the seeming contradictions of my contending heart."

"Not so," answered Edwin, "what was Lady Marion's you now devote to Scotland. Were you not a patriot, grief would prey upon your life."

"You have read me, Edwin," replied Wallace; "and that you may never love to idolatry, learn this also. Though Scotland lay in ruins, I was happy. She absorbed my wishes, my thoughts, my life!—and she was wrested from me that I might feel myself a slave; that the iron might enter into my soul, with which I was to pull down tyranny, and free my country. Mark the sacrifice, young man," cried Wallace, starting on his feet; "it now even smokes—and the flames are here inextinguishable. Never love as I have loved, and you will be a patriot, without needing to taste my bitter cup!"

Edwin trembled: his tears were checked. "I can love no one better than I do you, and is there any crime in that?"

Wallace recovered from the transient wildness which had possessed him. "None," replied he; "the affections are never criminal but when by their excess they blind us to other duties. The offence of mine is judged, and I bow to the penalty. When that is paid, then may my ashes sleep in rescued Scotland!—Then may the God of victory and of mercy grant that the seraph spirits of my wife and infant may meet my pardoned soul in paradise." As he spoke, he took the arm of the silent Edwin, and putting it through his, they descended the hill together.

On the open ground before the tower they were met by Murray. "I come to seek you," cried he; "we have had woe on woe in the citadel since you left it."

"Nothing very calamitous," returned Wallace, "if we may guess by the merry aspect of the messenger."

"Only a little whirlwind of my aunt's, in which we have had airs and showers enough to wet us through and blow us dry again."

The conduct of the lady had been even more extravagant than her nephew chose to describe. After the knight's departure, Lennox mentioned that when his men should arrive, it was Wallace's intention to march immediately for Stirling, whither, it could hardly be doubted, Aymer de Valence had fled. "I shall be left here," continued the earl, "to assist you, Lord Mar, in the severer duties attendant on being governor of this place."

No sooner did these words reach the ears of the countess than she hastened towards her husband, and exclaimed, "You will not suffer this?"

"No," returned the earl, mistaking her meaning; "not being able to perform the duties attendant on the responsible station with which Wallace would honour me, I shall relinquish it altogether to Lord Lennox, and be amply satisfied in finding myself under his protection."

"Ah, where is protection without Sir William Wallace?" cried she. "Who will defend your wife and only son from falling again into the hands of our doubly incensed foes?"

Mar observed Lord Lennox colour at this imputation on his bravery, and shocked at the affront which his unreflecting wife seemed to give so gallant a chief, he hastily replied. "Though this wounded arm cannot boast, yet the Earl of Lennox is an able representative of our commander."

"I will die, madam," interrupted Lennox, "before anything hostile approaches you or your children."

She attended slightly to this pledge, and again addressed her lord with fresh arguments for the detention of Wallace. Sir Roger Kirkpatrick, impatient under all this foolery, as he justly deemed it, abruptly said, "Be assured, fair lady, Israel's Samson was not brought into the world to keep guard over women! and I hope our champion will know his duty better than allow himself to be tied to any nursery girdle in Christendom."

The brave old earl was offended with this roughness, but its object darted her own severe retort on Kirkpatrick, and then, turning to her husband, with an hysterical sob, exclaimed, "It is well seen what will be my fate when Wallace is gone! Would he have stood by and beheld me thus insulted?"

Distressed with shame at her conduct, and anxious to remove her fear, Lord Mar softly whispered her, and threw his arm about her waist. She thrust him from her:—"You care not what may become of me, and my heart disdains your blandishments."

Lennox rose in silence, and walked to the other end of the chamber. Sir Roger Kirkpatrick followed him, muttering his thanks to Saint Andrew that he had never been yoked with a wife. But they discoursed in vain; she was obstinate, and at last left the room in a passion of tears.

On the return of Wallace, Lord Lennox advanced to meet

him. "What shall we do?" said he. "Without you have the witchcraft of Hercules, and can be in two places at once, I fear we must either leave the rest of Scotland to fight for itself, or never restore peace to this castle!"

Wallace smiled, but before he could answer, Lady Mar suddenly entered the room. She held her infant in her arms.

She approached Wallace: "You are come, my deliverer, to speak comfort to the mother of this poor babe. My cruel lord here, and the Earl of Lennox, say you mean to abandon us in this castle."

"It cannot be abandoned," returned the chief, "while they are in it. But if so warlike a scene alarms you, would not a religious sanctuary——"

"Not for worlds!" cried she, interrupting him; "what altar is held sacred by the enemies of our country? O! wonder not, then," added she, putting her face to that of her child, "that I should wish this innocent babe never to be from under the wing of such a protector."

"But that is impossible, Joanna," rejoined the earl; "Sir William Wallace has duties to perform superior to that of keeping watch over any private family. His presence is wanted in the field, and we should be traitors to the cause did we detain him."

"Unfeeling Mar," cried she, bursting into tears, "thus to echo the words of the barbarian Kirkpatrick. You will see another tragedy—your own wife and child seized by the returning Southrons, and laid bleeding at your feet!"

Wallace walked from her much agitated.

"Rather inhuman, Joanna," whispered Lord Mar to her, "to make such a reference in the presence of our protector! I cannot stay to listen to a pertinacity as insulting to the rest of our brave leaders as it is oppressive to Sir William Wallace. Edwin, you will come for me when your aunt consents to be guided by right reason." While yet speaking he entered the passage that led to his own apartment.

Lady Mar sat a few minutes silent. Edwin was speaking to Wallace. "What does he tell you?" said she; "that my lord has left me in displeasure? Alas! he comprehends not a mother's anxiety for her sole remaining child. One of my sweet twins died on my being brought a prisoner to this fortress, and to lose this also would be more than I could bear. Look at this babe," cried she, holding it up to him; "let it

plead to you for its life ! Guard it, noble Wallace, whatever may become of me ! ”

The appeal of a mother made instant way to Sir William’s heart : even her weaknesses, did they point to anxiety respecting her offspring, were sacred with him. “ What would you have me do, madam ? If you fear to remain here, tell me where you think you would be safer and I will be your conductor ? ”

She paused to repress the triumph with which this proposal filled her, and then, with downcast eyes, replied—“ In the sea-girt Bute stands Rothesay, a rude but strong castle of my lord’s. It possesses nothing to attract the notice of the enemy, and there I might remain in perfect safety. Lord Mar may keep his station here until a general victory sends you to restore my child to its father.”

Wallace bowed his assent to her proposal ; and Edwin, remembering the earl’s injunction, inquired if he might inform him of what was decided. When he left the room Lady Mar rose, and suddenly putting her son into the arms of Wallace—“ Let his sweet caresses thank you.” Wallace trembled as he pressed its little mouth to his ; and, mistranslating this emotion, she dropped her face upon the infant’s, and in affecting to kiss it, rested her head upon the bosom of the chief. There was something in this action more than maternal ; it surprised and disconcerted Wallace. “ Madam,” said he, drawing back, and relinquishing the child, “ I do not require any thanks for serving the wife and son of Lord Mar.”

At that moment the earl entered. Lady Mar flattered herself that the repelling action of Wallace and his cold answer, had arisen from the expectation of this entrance ; yet blushing with something like disappointment, she hastily uttered a few agitated words to inform her husband that Bute was to be her future sanctuary.

Lord Mar approved it, and declared his determination to accompany her. “ In my state I can be of little use here,” said he ; “ my family will require protection, even in that seclusion, and therefore leaving Lord Lennox sole governor of Dumbarton, I shall unquestionably attend them to Rothesay myself.”

This arrangement would break in upon the lonely conversations she had meditated to have with Wallace, and therefore the countess objected to the proposal. But none of her

arguments being admitted by her lord, and as Wallace did not support them by a word, she was obliged to make a merit of necessity, and consent to her husband being their companion.

CHAPTER XXV.

RENFREWSHIRE.

TOWARDS evening, the next day, Ker not only returned with the Earl of Lennox's men, but brought with them Sir Eustace Maxwell of Carlaveroch. That knight happened to be in the neighbourhood the very same night in which De Valence fled before the arms of Wallace, and he no sooner saw the Scottish colours on the walls of Dumbarton than his soul took fire; and stung with a generous ambition of equalling in glory his equal in years, he determined to assist while he emulated the victor.

To this end, he traversed the adjoining country, striving to enlighten the understandings of the satisfied, and to excite the discontented to revolt. With most he failed. Some warned him, if he would keep his head on his shoulders, to wear his yoke in peace. And others, again, who had families, shrunk from taking part in a cause which, should it fail, would not only put their lives in danger, but expose their offspring to the revenge of a resentful enemy. This was the best apology of any offered: natural affection was the pleader, and though blinded to its true interest, was pardoned.

In short, none but about a hundred poor fellows, whom outrages had rendered desperate, and a few brave spirits, who would put all to the hazard for so good a cause, could be prevailed on to hold themselves in readiness to obey Sir Eustace, when he should see the moment to conduct them to Sir William Wallace. He was trying his eloquence among the clan of Lennox, when Ker arriving stamped his persuasions with truth, and above five hundred men arranged themselves under their lord's standard. Maxwell gladly explained himself to Wallace's lieutenant, and, summoning his little reserve, they marched with flying pennons through the town of Dumbarton. At sight of so much larger a power than they expected would venture to appear in arms, several, who before had held back, now came forward, and nearly eight hundred well-appointed men marched into the fortress.

So large a reinforcement was gratefully received by Wallace,

and he welcomed Maxwell with a cordiality which inspired that young knight with an affection equal to his zeal.

A council being held respecting the disposal of the new troops, it was decided that the Lennox men must remain with their earl in garrison, while those brought by Maxwell, and under his command, should follow Wallace in the prosecution of his conquests.

These preliminaries being arranged, the remainder of the day was dedicated to the unfolding of the plan of warfare which Wallace had conceived. As he first sketched the general outline of his design, and then proceeded to the particulars of each military movement, he displayed such comprehensiveness of mind, such depth of penetration, clearness of apprehension, facility in expedients, promptitude in perceiving and fixing on the most favourable points of attack, that Maxwell gazed on him with admiration and Lennox with wonder.

Lennox had thought that Wallace might have won Dumbarton by a bold stroke, and that when his invincible courage should be steered by graver heads, every success might be expected from his arms ; but now that he heard him informing veterans on the art of war, he marvelled, and said within himself, " Surely this man is born to be a sovereign ! "

Maxwell, though equally astonished, was not so rapt. " You have made arms the study of your life ? " inquired he.

" It was the study of my earliest days," returned Wallace. " But when Scotland lost her freedom, as the sword was not drawn in her defence, I looked not where it lay. I then studied the arts of peace ; that is over ; and now the passion of my soul revives. When the mind is bent on one object only, all becomes clear that leads to it ; zeal, in such cases, is almost genius."

Soon after these observations, it was admitted that Wallace might attend Lord Mar and his family to the Isle of Bute.

When the dawn broke, he arose and having called twenty of the Bothwell men to escort their lord, he told Ireland he should expect to have a cheerful account of the wounded on his return.

When they reached the citadel, Lennox and all the officers in the garrison were assembled to bid their chief a short adieu. Wallace spoke to each separately, and then approaching the countess, led her down the rock to the horses which were to convey them to the Frith of Clyde. Lord Mar, between Murray and Edwin, followed ; and the servants and guard completed the suite.

Being well mounted, they pleasantly pursued their way, avoiding inhabited places and resting in the deepest recesses of the hills. Lord Mar had proposed travelling all night; but at the close of the evening his countess complained of fatigue, declaring she could not advance further than the eastern bank of the river Cart. No shelter appeared in sight, excepting a thick and extensive wood of hazels; but the air being mild, and the lady declaring her inability of moving on, Lord Mar at last became reconciled to his wife and son passing the night with no other canopy than the trees. Wallace ordered cloaks to be spread on the ground for the countess and her women; and seeing them laid to rest, planting his men to keep guard around the circle.

The moon had sunk before the whole of his little camp were asleep; but when all seemed composed, he wandered forth by the light of the stars to view the surrounding country—a country he had so often traversed in his boyish days.

Leaning on the shattered stump of an old tree, he fixed his eyes on the far-stretching plain, which alone seemed to divide him from the venerable Sir Ronald Crawford and his youthful haunts at Ayr. A strange emotion stirred within him. When he last passed these borders, he was bringing his bride from Ayr! What then was this ethereal visitant? The silver light of the stars was not brighter than its airy robes, which floated in the wind. His heart paused—it beat violently—still the figure advanced. Lost in the wildness of his imagination, he exclaimed “Marion!” and darted forwards, as if to rush into her embrace. But it fled, and again vanished. He dropped upon the ground in speechless disappointment.

“Tis false!” cried he, “’tis a phantom of my own creating. The pure spirit of Marion would never fly me; I loved her too well. She would not thus redouble my grief. But I shall go to thee, wife of my soul, and that is comfort.”

Such were his words, his thoughts, till the coldness of the hour and the exhaustion of nature putting a friendly seal upon his senses, he sunk upon the bank, and fell into a profound sleep.

When he awoke the lark was carolling above his head, and to his surprise he found that a plaid was laid over him. He threw it off, and beheld Edwin seated at his feet. “This has been your doing, my kind brother,” said he; “but how came you to discover me?”

“I missed you when the dawn broke, and at last found you here, sleeping under the dew.”

“ And has none else been astir ? ” inquired Wallace, thinking of the figure he had seen.

“ None that I know of. All were fast asleep when I left the party.”

Wallace began to fancy that he had been labouring under the impressions of some powerful dream, and saying no more, he returned to the wood. Finding everybody ready, he took his station ; and setting forth, all proceeded through the delightful valleys of Barochan. By sunset they arrived at the point of embarkation. The journey ought to have been performed in half the time ; but the countess petitioned for long rests, a compliance with which the younger part of the cavalcade conceded with reluctance.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE FRITH OF CLYDE.

AT Gourock, Murray engaged two small vessels : one for the earl and countess, with Wallace as their escort ; the other for himself and Edwin, to follow with a few of the men.

It was a fine evening, and they embarked with everything in their favour. The hours flew pleasantly away, till, turning the southern point of the Cowal mountains, the scene suddenly changed. The wind, which had gradually been rising, blew a violent gale from that part of the coast ; and the sea, being pent between the rocks which skirt the continent and the northern side of Bute, became so boisterous, that the boatmen began to think they should be driven upon the rocks of the island, instead of reaching its bay. Wallace tore down the sails, and laying his nervous arm to the oar, assisted to keep the vessel off the breakers, against which the waves were driving her.

Lady Mar looked with affright at the gathering tempest, and with difficulty was persuaded to retire under the shelter of a little awning. The earl forgot his debility in the general terror, and tried to reassure the boatmen. But a tremendous sweep of the gale, driving the vessel far across the head of Bute, shot her past the mouth of Loch Fyne, towards the perilous rocks of Arran. “ Here our destruction is certain ! ” cried the master of the bark, at the same time confessing his ignorance of the navigation on this side of the island. Lord Mar, seizing the helm from the stupefied master, called to Wallace, “ Keep the men to their duty, I will steer.”

The earl being perfectly acquainted with the coast, Wallace gladly saw the helm in his hand. But he had scarcely stepped forward himself, to give some necessary directions, when a heavy sea, breaking over the deck, carried two of the poor mariners overboard. Wallace instantly threw out a couple of ropes. One caught a rope and was saved ; but the other was seen no more.

Wallace, now with two rowers only, applied his whole strength to their aid. The master and the third man were employed in the unceasing toil of laving out the accumulating water.

All this while Lady Mar lay in a state of stupefaction ; she had fallen from swoon to swoon, and now remained almost insensible upon the bosoms of her maids. In a moment the vessel struck with a great shock, and the next instant it seemed to move with a velocity incredible. "The whirlpool ! the whirlpool !" resounded from every lip. But again the rapid motion was suddenly checked, and the women, fancying they had struck on the Vrekin rock, shrieked aloud.

The last rays of the setting sun had long passed away, and the deep shadows of the driving heavens cast the whole into a gloom even more terrific than absolute darkness, while the beetling rocks mocked the hopes of the sea-beaten mariner, should he even buffet the waters to reach their base ; and the jagged shingles, deeply shelving beneath their waves, or projecting their pointing summits upward, showed the crew where the rugged death would meet them.

A little onward, a thousand fragments, rent by former tempests from their parent cliffs, lay at the foundations of the immense acclivities which faced the cause of their present alarm—a whirlpool almost as terrific as that of Scarba. The moment the powerful blast drove the vessel within the influence of the outward edge of the first circle of the vortex, Wallace leaped on the rocks, and with the same rope in his hand with which he had saved the life of the seaman, he called to the two men to follow him, who yet held similar ropes, fastened like his own to the prow of the vessel, and strove, by towing it along, to stem the suction of the current.

It was at this instant that Lady Mar rushed forward upon deck. "In for your life, Joanna !" exclaimed the earl. She answered him not, but looked wildly around her. Nowhere could she see Wallace.

"Have I drowned him?" cried she, in a voice of frenzy. "Let me clasp him, even in the deep waters!"

Happily the earl lost the last sentence in the roaring of the storm.

"Wallace, Wallace!" cried she, wringing her hands, and struggling with her women. At that moment, a huge wave sinking before her discovered the object of her fears, straining along the surface of a rock, and followed by the men in the same laborious task, tugging forward the ropes to which the bark was attached. She gazed at them with wonder, for notwithstanding the beating of the elements, they continued to bear resolutely onward. Fortunately, they did not now labour against the wind. Sometimes they pressed forward on the level edge of the rock; then a yawning chasm forced them to leap from cliff to cliff, or to spring on some more elevated projection. Thus, contending with the vortex and the storm, they at last arrived at the doubling of Cuthon rock,* the point that was to clear them of this minor Corie Vrekin.

Again Lady Mar appeared. At sight of Wallace she forgot everything but him; and perhaps would have thrown herself into his arms, had not the anxious earl caught her in his own.

"Are we to die?" cried she to Wallace in a voice of horror.

"I trust that God has decreed otherwise," was his reply.

"Compose yourself: all may yet be well."

Lord Mar, from his yet unhealed wounds, could not swim; Wallace therefore tore up the benches of the rowers, and binding them into the form of a small raft, made it the vehicle for the earl and countess, with her two maids and the child. While the men were towing it, and buffeting with it through the breakers, he threw himself into the sea to swim by its side, and be in readiness in case of accident.

Having gained the broken rocks that lie at the foot of the stupendous craigs which surround the Isle of Arran, Wallace and his assistants conveyed the countess and her terrified women up their acclivities. Fortunately the wind nearly cleared the heavens of clouds, and allowed the moon to send forth her guiding light. By her lamp one of the men discovered the mouth of a cavern, where Wallace gladly sheltered his dripping charges.

The child, whom he had guarded in his own arms during the difficult ascent, he now laid on the bosom of its mother. Lady

* *Cuthon means the mournful sound of waves.*

Mar kissed the hand that relinquished it, and gave way to a flood of grateful tears.

The earl, as he sank almost powerless against the side of the cave, yet had strength enough to press Wallace to his heart—"Ever preserver of me and mine!" cried he, "how must I bless thee!—My wife, my child——"

"Have been saved to you, my friend," interrupted Wallace, "by the presiding care of Him who walked the waves! Without His especial arm we must all have perished in this awful night, therefore let our thanksgivings be directed to Him alone."

"So be it!" returned the earl, and dropping on his knees, he breathed forth so pathetic and sublime a prayer of thanks, that the countess trembled, and bent her head upon the bosom of her child.

Sleep soon sealed every weary eye excepting those of Wallace. A racking anxiety respecting the fate of the other vessel filled his mind with dreadful forebodings, that they had not outlived the storm.

While his companions were still wrapped in sleep, Wallace stole away to seek some knowledge respecting the part of the Isle of Arran on which they were cast. Close by the mouth of the cave he discovered a cleft in the rock, into which he turned, and finding the upward footing sufficiently secure clambered to the summit. He found himself at the skirt of a chain of high hills, which seemed to stretch from side to side over the island, while their tops, in alpine succession, rose in a thousand grotesque and pinnacled forms. Ptarmigan and capperkaily were screaming from those upper regions, and nimble roes, with their fawns, bounding through the green defiles below. No trace of human habitation appeared; but from the size and known population of the island, he knew he could not be far from inhabitants, and thinking it best to send the boatmen in search of them, he retraced his steps.

On re-entering the cave he despatched the seamen, and disposed himself to watch by the sides of his still sleeping friends. An hour hardly had elapsed before the men returned, bringing with them a large boat and its proprietor. But, alas! no tidings of Murray and Edwin, whom he had hoped might have been driven somewhere on the island. In bringing the boat round to the creek under the rock, the men discovered that the sea had driven their wreck between two rocks, where

it now lay wedged. Though ruined as a vessel, sufficient held together to warrant their exertions to save the property. Accordingly they entered it, and drew thence most of the valuables which belonged to Lord Mar.

While this was doing, Wallace reascended to the cave, and finding the earl awake, told him a boat was ready for their re-embarkation. "But where, my friend, are my nephews?" inquired he: "Alas! has this fatal expedition robbed me of them?"

Wallace tried to inspire him with a hope he scarcely dared credit himself, that they had been saved on some more distant shore. The voices of the chiefs awakened the women, but the countess still slept. Aware that she would resist trusting herself to the waves again, Lord Mar desired that she might be moved on board without disturbing her. This was readily done, the men having only to take up the extremities of the plaid on which she lay, and so carry her with an imperceptible motion to the boat, and once more the little party found themselves launched upon the sea.

While they were yet mid-way between the isles, the countess, heaving a deep sigh, slowly opened her eyes. All around glared with the light of day; she felt the motion of the boat, and raising her head, saw that she was again embarked on the treacherous element on which she had lately experienced so many terrors. She grew deadly pale, and grasped her husband's hand. "My dear Joanna," cried he, "be not alarmed, we are all safe."

"And Sir William Wallace has left us?" demanded she.

"No, madam," answered a voice from the steerage, "not till this party be safe at Bute do I quit it."

She looked round with a grateful smile: "Ever generous! How could I for a moment doubt our preserver?"

Wallace bowed, but remained silent; and they passed calmly along till the vessel came in sight of a birling,* which, was presently so near the earl's, that the figures in each could be distinctly seen. In it the chiefs, to their rapturous surprise, beheld Murray and Edwin. The latter, with a cry of joy, leaped into the sea; the next instant he was over the boat's side, and clasped in the arms of Wallace.

While this was passing the birling had drawn close to the boat; and Murray, shaking hands with his uncle and aunt,

* Birling is a small boat generally used by fishers.

exclaimed to Wallace, "That urchin is such a monopoliser. I see you have not a greeting for any one else." On this Edwin raised his face, and turned to the affectionate welcomes of Lord Mar. Wallace stretched out his hand to the ever-gay Lord Andrew, and, inviting him into the boat, soon learnt that on the beginning of the storm Murray's company made direct to the nearest creek in Bute, being better seamen than Wallace's helmsman, who had foolishly continued to aim for Rothesay. By this prudence, without having been in much peril, or sustained much fatigue, Murray's party had landed safely. The night came on, dark and tremendous; but not doubting that the earl's rowers had carried him into a similar haven, the young chief and his companion kept themselves very easy in a fisher's hut till morning. At an early hour they put themselves at the head of the Bothwell men, and, expecting they should come up with Wallace and his party at Rothesay, walked over to the castle. Their consternation was unutterable when they found that Lord Mar was not there, neither had he been heard of. Full of terror, Murray and Edwin threw themselves into a birling to seek their friends upon the seas, and when they did espy them, the joy of Edwin was so great that not even the unfathomable gulf could stop him from flying to the embrace of his friend.

While mutual felicitations passed, the boats reached the shore, and the seamen moored their vessels under the projecting towers of Rothesay. The old steward hastened to receive a master who had not blessed his aged eyes for many a year, and when he took the infant in his arms that was to be the future representative of the house of Mar he wept aloud. The earl spoke to him affectionately, and then walked on with Edwin, whom he called to support him up the bank. Murray led the countess out of the boat, while the Bothwell men so thronged about Wallace, congratulating themselves on his safety, that she saw there was no hope of his arm being offered to her.

Having entered the castle, the steward led them into a room, in which he had spread a plentiful repast. Here Murray (having recounted the adventures of his voyage), called for a history of what had befallen his friends. The earl gladly took up the tale, and, with many a glance of gratitude to Wallace, narrated the events of their shipwreck, and providential preservation on the Isle of Arran.

Happiness now seemed to have shed her influence over every bosom. All hearts owned the grateful effects of the late rescue. Edwin burst into a thousand sallies of ardent imagination. Murray turned every transient subject into a "mirth-moving jest." The veteran earl seemed restored to health and youth, and Wallace felt the sun of consolation expanding in his bosom. He had met a heart, on which his soul might repose : that dear selected brother of his affection was saved, and all his superstitious dreams of a mysterious doom vanished before this manifestation of heavenly goodness. His friend, too, the gallant Murray, was spared. How many subjects had he for unmurmuring gratitude !

The pouring out of his beneficent spirit turned every eye and heart towards him, as to a being who seemed made to love, and be beloved by every one. Lady Mar looked at him, listened to him, with her rapt soul seated in her eye. In his presence all was transport.

But when he withdrew for the night, what was then the state of her feelings ! The overflowing of heart he felt for all she appropriated solely to herself. The sweetness of his voice, the unutterable expression of his countenance, had raised such vague hopes in her bosom, that—he being gone—she hastened her adieus to the rest, eager to retire to bed, and there uninterruptedly muse on the happiness of having at last touched the heart of a man for whom she would resign the world.

CHAPTER XXVII.

ISLE OF BUTE.

THE morning would have brought annihilation to the countess's hopes, had not Murray been the first to meet her as she came from her chamber.

While walking on the cliffs at some distance from the castle he met Wallace and Edwin. They had ordered a boat to convey them back to Gourock. "Postpone your flight, for pity's sake !" cried Murray, "if you would not, by discourtesy, destroy what your gallantry has preserved !" He then told them that Lady Mar was preparing a feast in the glen, "and if you do not stay to partake it," added he, "we may expect all the witches in the isle will be bribed to sink us before we reach the shore."

After this, the general meeting of the morning was not less cordial than the separation of the night before ; and when Lady Mar withdrew to give orders for her banquet, that time was seized by the earl for the arrangement of matters of more consequence.

While the earl and his friends were marshalling armies, taking towns, and storming castles, the countess was meaning to destroy that manly spirit by soft delights, which a continuance in war's rugged scenes she thought was too likely to render invulnerable.

When her lord and his guests were summoned to the feast, she met them at the mouth of the glen simply clad in her favourite green.* Moraig, the pretty grandchild of the steward, walked beside her, gaily decorated in all the flowers of spring. "Here is the lady of my elfin revels, holding her little king in her arms!" As the countess spoke, Moraig held up the infant of Lady Mar, dressed like herself, in a tissue gathered from the field. The sweet babe laughed and crowed, and made a spring to leap into Wallace's arms. The chief took him, and with an affectionate smile, pressed his little cheek to his.

Though he had felt the repugnance of a delicate mind mingle into an abhorrence of the countess, when she allowed her head to drop on his breast in the citadel ; and though, while he remained at Dumbarton, he had certainly avoided her, yet since the wreck, the general joy of all meeting again, had wiped away even the remembrance of his former cause of dislike, and he now sat by her as by a sister, fondling her child, although at every sweet caress it reminded him of hopes lost to him for ever.

The repast over, the piper appeared ; and, at the blast of his merry instrument the young peasants of both sexes jocundly came forward and began to dance. At this sight Edwin seized the little hand of Moraig, while Lord Andrew called a pretty lass from among the rustics, and joined the group.

Lady Mar watched the countenance of Wallace as he looked upon the joyous group ; it was placid, and a soft complacency illumined his eye. How different was the expression in hers, had he marked it ! All within her was in tumults, and the characters were but too legibly imprinted on her face. But

* Green was the colour most worn by the ladies in the early ages of Scotland.

he did not look on her, for the child began to cry. He rose, and having resigned it to the nurse, turned into a narrow vista of trees, where he walked slowly on, unconscious whither he went.

Lady Mar followed him till she saw him turn out of the vista, and then she lost sight of him. To walk with him undisturbed in so deep a seclusion ; to improve the impression which she was sure she had made upon his heart ; to teach him to forget his Marion, in the hope of one day possessing her—all these thoughts ran in this vain woman's head ; and, inwardly rejoicing that the shattered health of her husband promised her a ready freedom to become the wife of the man to whom she would gladly belong, she hastened forward as if the accomplishment of her wishes depended on this meeting. Peeping through the trees, she saw him standing with folded arms, looking intently into the bosom of a large lake.

Several times she essayed to emerge and join him ; but a sudden awe of him, a recollection of the ejaculation with which he had accosted her before, when she haunted his footsteps on the banks of the Cart, made her pause. He might again mistake her for the same dear object. This image it was not her interest to recall. And to approach near him, to unveil her heart to him, and to be repulsed—there was madness in the idea, and she retreated.

She remained by the side of the dancers for nearly an hour, before Wallace reappeared. But then she sprang towards him as if a spell were broken. “ Where, truant, have you been ? ”

“ In a beautiful solitude,” returned he, “ amongst a luxuriant grove of willows.”

“ Ay ! ” cried she ; “ it is called Glenshealeach, and a sad scene was acted there ! About ten years ago, a lady of this island drowned herself in the lake they hang over, because the man she loved despised her.”

“ Unhappy woman ! ” observed Wallace.

“ Then you would have pitied her ? ” rejoined Lady Mar.

“ He cannot be a man that would not pity a woman under such circumstances.”

“ Then *you* would not have consigned her to such a fate ? ”

Wallace was startled by the peculiar tone in which this simple question was asked. Turning a penetrating look on her, his eye met hers. He need not have heard further to have learnt more. She hastily looked down, and coloured ;

and he, wishing to misunderstand a language so disgraceful to herself, so dishonouring to her husband, gave some trifling answer, then making a slight observation about the earl, he advanced to him. Lord Mar was become tired with so gala a scene, and taking the arm of Wallace they returned together into the house.

Edwin soon followed with Murray, gladly arriving in time enough to see their little pinnacle draw up under the castle, and throw out her moorings. The countess, too, descried its streamers; and hastening into the room where she knew the chiefs were yet assembled, though the wearied earl had retired to repose, inquired the reason of that boat having drawn so near the castle.

"That it may take us from it, fair aunt," replied Murray.

The countess fixed her eyes with an unequivocal expression upon Wallace. "My gratitude is ever due to your kindness, noble lady," said he, still wishing to be blind to what he could not but perceive; "and that we may ever deserve it, we go to keep the enemy from your doors."

"Yes!" added Murray, "and to keep a more insidious foe from your own! Edwin and I feel it rather dangerous to bask too long in these sunny bowers."

"So, if you do not mean to play Circe to our Ulysses, give us leave to go!" Lady Mar started, confused, she knew not how, as Edwin innocently uttered these words, and disappeared, to give some speeding directions respecting the boat.

Left thus alone with the object of her every wish, in the moment when she thought she was going to lose him perhaps for ever, she forgot all reserve, and laying her hand on his arm, as with a bow he was also moving away, she arrested his steps. She held him fast, but agitation prevented her speaking; she trembled violently, and weeping, dropped her head upon his shoulder. He was motionless. Her tears redoubled. He felt the embarrassment of his situation, and at last inquired the cause of her uneasiness. "If for the safeties of your nephews——"

"No, no," cried she, interrupting him; "read my fate in that of the lady of Glenshealeach!"

Again he was silent; fearful of too promptly understanding so disgraceful a truth, he found no words in which to answer her, and her emotions became so uncontrolled that he expected she would swoon in his arms.

"Cruel, cruel Wallace!" at last cried she, "your heart is steeled or it would understand mine. It would at least pity the wretchedness it has created. But I am despised, and I can yet find the watery grave from which you rescued me."

To dissemble longer would have been folly. "Your husband, Lady Mar, is my friend; had I even a heart to give to woman, not one sigh should arise in it to his dishonour. But I am lost to all warmer affections than that of friendship. Never more can I look on female form with love."

Lady Mar's tears now flowed in a more tempered current.

"But were it otherwise," cried she, "had I not been made the property of a man who, however estimable, was of too paternal years for me to love; ah! tell me, if these tears should now flow in vain?"

Wallace seemed to hesitate what to answer.

Wrought up to agony, she threw herself on his breast. "Answer! but drive me not to despair. I never loved man before—and now to be scorned! Oh, kill me, too, dear Wallace, but tell me not that you never could have loved me."

Wallace was alarmed at her vehemence. "Lady Mar," returned he, "I am incapable of saying anything to you that is inimical to your duty to the best of men. I will even forget this distressing conversation, and continue through life to revere the wife of my friend."

"And I am to be stabbed with this?" replied she, in a voice of indignant anguish.

"You are to be healed with it, Lady Mar," returned he; "for it is not a man like the rest of his sex that now addresses you, but a being whose heart is petrified to marble. Yes, were virtue lost to me, still memory would speak; still would the last kiss, imprinted by my wife on these lips, live there in unblemished sanctity, till I again meet her angel embraces in the world to come!"

"What she was, I would be to thee—thy consoler, thine adorer. Time may set me free. O! till then, only give me leave to love thee and I shall be happy!"

"You dishonour yourself, lady," returned he, "you sacrifice your peace, and your self-esteem, to a phantom; for I am dead to woman, and the voice of love sounds like the funeral knell of her who will never breathe it to me again." He rose as he spoke, and the countess, almost despairing of now retaining any part in his esteem, was devising what next to say, when Murray came into the room with a stranger.

Wallace instantly observed that his countenance was troubled. "What has happened?" inquired he.

"A messenger from the main land, with bad news from Ayr. There has been a horrid massacre, in which the heads of many noble families have fallen." As he spoke, the paleness of his countenance revealed to his friend that part of the information he had found himself unable to communicate.

"I comprehend my loss," cried Wallace; "Sir Ronald Crawford is sacrificed!"

"This gallant stranger," said Murray, "is Sir John Graham. He has just left that new theatre of Southron perfidy."

"I have hastened hither," cried the knight, "to call your victorious arm to take a signal vengeance on the murderers of your grandfather. He, and eighteen other Scottish chiefs, have been treacherously put to death in the Barns of Ayr."

Graham then gave a brief narration of the direful circumstance. He and his father, Lord Dundaff, having crossed the south coast of Scotland in their way homeward, stopped to rest at Ayr. They arrived there the very day that Lord Aymer de Valence had entered it, a fugitive from Dumbarton Castle. Much as that earl wished to keep the success of Wallace a secret from the inhabitants of Ayr, he found it impossible. Two or three fugitive soldiers whispered the hard fighting they had endured, and in half an hour after the arrival of the English earl every soul knew that the recovery of Scotland was begun. Elated with this intelligence, the Scots went, under night, from house to house, congratulating each other on so miraculous an interference in their favour, and many stole to Sir Ronald Crawford to felicitate the venerable knight on his glorious grandson.

The next morning this venerable old man, and other chiefs of similar consequence, were summoned by Sir Richard Arnulf, the governor, to his palace, there to deliver in a schedule of their estates; "that quiet possession," the governor said, "might be granted to them, under the great seal of Lord Aymer de Valence, the deputy-warden of Scotland."

The grey-headed knight happened to be the last who went to this tiger's den. Wrapped in his plaid, his silver hair covered with a blue bonnet, and leaning on his staff, he was walking along attended by two domestics when Sir John Graham met him at the gate of the palace. He smiled on him as he passed, and whispered, "It will not be long before

my Wallace makes even the forms of vassalage unnecessary ; and then these failing limbs may sit undisturbed at home, under the fig-tree and vine of his planting ! ”

“ God grant it ! ” returned Graham ; and he saw Sir Ronald admitted within the interior gate. The servants were ordered to remain without. Sir John walked there some time, expecting the reappearance of the knight ; but after an hour, he turned his steps towards his own lodgings. While passing along, he met several Southron detachments hurrying across the streets. In the midst of some of these companies, he saw one or two Scottish men of rank, strangers to him, but who, by certain indications, seemed to be prisoners. He did not go far before he met a chieftain in these painful circumstances, whom he knew ; but as he was hastening towards him, the noble Scot raised his manacled hand, and turned away his head. This was a warning to the young knight, who darted into an obscure alley and was hurrying forward when he met one of his own servants running in quest of him.

Panting with haste, he informed his master that a party of armed men had come, under De Valence’s warrant, to seize Lord Dundaff and bear him to prison—to lie there with others who were charged with having taken part in a conspiracy with the grandfather of the insurgent Wallace.

The officer of the band who took Lord Dundaff, told him in the most insulting language, that “ Sir Ronald, his ring-leader, with eighteen nobles, his accomplices, had already suffered the punishment of their crime, and were lying, headless trunks, in the judgment-hall ! ”

“ Haste, therefore,” repeated the man ; “ my lord bids you haste to Sir William Wallace, and require his hand to avenge his kinsman’s blood, and to free his countrymen from prison ! These are your father’s commands ; he directed me to seek you and give them to you.”

Alarmed for the life of his father, Graham hesitated how to act on the moment. To leave him seemed to abandon him to the death the others had received ; and yet, only by obeying him could he have any hopes of averting his threatened fate ; giving his signet to his servant, to assure Lord Dundaff of his obedience, he mounted a horse which had been brought to the town end for that purpose, and setting off at full speed, allowed nothing to stay him till he reached the presence of the chief. He narrated his tale with a simplicity and pathos which

would have instantly drawn the retributive sword of Wallace had he had no kinsman to avenge, no friend to release from the Southron dungeons. But as the case stood, his bleeding grandfather lay before his eyes, and the axe hung over the heads of the most virtuous nobles of his country.

He heard the chieftain to an end without speaking or altering the stern attention of his countenance. But at the close, he rose. "Sir John Graham," said he, "I attend you. This moment I will set out for Dumbarton to bring away the sinews of my strength. God will be our speed! and then this arm shall show how I loved that good old man."

"Your men," interrupted Graham, "are already awaiting you on the opposite shore. I presumed to command for you; for on entering Dumbarton, and finding you were absent, I dared to interpret your mind, and to order Sir Alexander Scrymgeour and Sir Roger Kirkpatrick, with all your own force, to follow me to the coast of Renfrew."

"Thank you, my friend!" cried Wallace, grasping his hand; "may I ever have such interpreters! I cannot stay to bid your uncle farewell," said he to Lord Andrew; "remain to tell him to bless me with his prayers, and then, dear Murray, follow me to Ayr."

Ignorant of what the stranger had imparted, at the sight of the chiefs approaching from the castle gate, Edwin hastened with the news that all was ready for embarkation. He was hurrying out his information when the altered countenance of his general checked him. No word was spoken, but Edwin saw him leap into the boat, followed by the stranger. The astonished boy, though unnoticed, would not be left behind, and stepping in also, sat down beside his chief.

While the little bark bounded over the waves, the poor pilgrims of earth who were its freightage, bent towards each other, intent on the further information they were to receive.

"Here is a list of the murdered chiefs, and of those who are in the dungeons, expecting the like treatment," continued Graham, holding out a parchment; "it was given to me by my servant." Wallace took it, but seeing his grandfather's name at the top he could look no further. "Gallant Graham," said he, "I want no stimulus to urge me to the extirpation I meditate. If the sword of heaven be with us, not one perpetrator of this horrid massacre shall be alive to-morrow."

"What massacre?" Edwin ventured to inquire. Wallace

put the parchment into his hand. Edwin opened the roll, and on seeing the words, "A list of the Scottish chiefs murdered on the 18th of June, 1297, in the Judgment-Hall of the English Barons at Ayr," his cheek reddened with the hue of indignation.

After Sir Ronald Crawford's name followed that of Sir Bryce Blair, then Sir Neil Montgomery, and those of the Baron of Auchinleck, Sir Walter Barclay, Sir Thomas Boyd, and the Chieftain of Kennedy. In turning the page, his eye glanced to the opposite side; and he saw at the head of "A list of prisoners in the dungeons of Ayr," the name of "Lord Dundaff," and immediately after it, that of "Lord Ruthven!" He uttered a cry: and extending his arms to Wallace, who turned round at so unusual a sound, the terror-struck boy exclaimed, "My father is in their hands! Oh! fly to Ayr, and save him!"

Wallace took up the open list which Edwin had dropped; he saw the name of Lord Ruthven amongst the prisoners; and folding his arms around this affectionate son, "Compose yourself," said he, "it is to Ayr I am going; and if the God of justice be our speed, your father and Lord Dundaff shall not see another day in prison."

"Who is this youth?" inquired Graham; "to which of the noble companions of my captive father is he son?"

"To William Ruthven," answered Wallace; "the valiant lord of the Carse of Gowrie. And it is a noble scion from that glorious root. He it was that enabled me to win Dumbarton. Look up, my brother! and hear me recount the first fruits of your maiden arms to our gallant friend."

As Wallace proceeded, the wonder of Graham was raised to a pitch only to be equalled by his admiration; and taking the hand of Edwin, "Receive me," said he, "as your second brother; Sir William Wallace is your first; but this night we shall fight side by side for our fathers; and let that be our bond of kindred."

"Let us, together, free them," cried Edwin; "and then we shall be born twins in happiness."

"So be it," cried Graham; "and Sir William Wallace be the sponsor of that hour!"

Wallace smiled on them; and turning his head towards the shore, when the vessel doubled a certain point, he saw the beach covered with armed men. To be sure they were his own, he drew his sword, and waved it in the air. At that

moment a hundred falchions flashed in the sunbeams, and the shouts of "Wallace!" came loudly on the breeze.

Graham and Edwin started on their feet; the seamen plied their oars; the boat dashed into the breakers—and Wallace, leaping on shore, was received with acclamations by his eager soldiers.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE BARNs OF AYR.

WALLACE no sooner landed than he commenced his march. Murray joined him on the banks of the Irwin; and as Ayr was no distance from that river, at two hours before midnight the little army entered Laglane Wood, where they halted, while Wallace with his chieftains proceeded to reconnoitre the town. The wind swept in gusts through the trees, and seemed to utter warnings of the retributions he was about to inflict. He had already declared his plan of destruction; and Graham, as a first measure, went to the spot he had fixed on with Macdougall, his servant, as a place of rendezvous. He returned with the man, who informed Wallace that, in honour of the sequestrated lands having been that day partitioned amongst certain Southron lords, a feast was going on in the governor's palace. Under the very roof where they had shed the blood of the Scots they were now keeping this carousal!

"Now, then, is our time to strike!" cried Wallace; and ordering detachments of his men to take possession of the avenues to the town, he set forth with others to reach the front of the castle gates, by a less frequented path than the main street. The darkness being great, they had not gone far before Macdougall, who had undertaken to be their guide, discovered that he had lost the road.

Unwilling to miss any advantage, Wallace gladly hailed a twinkling light which gleamed from what he supposed the window of a distant cottage. Kirkpatrick, with Macdougall, offered to go forward, and explore what it might be. In a few minutes they arrived at a thatched building, from which, to their surprise, issued the wailing strains of the coronach. Its melancholy notes were sung by female voices. Hence, there being no danger in applying to such harmless inhabitants to learn the way to the citadel, he proceeded to the door, and discovered two poor women, wringing their hands over a

shrouded corse. While the chief entered his friends came up. Murray and Graham, struck with sounds never breathed over the vulgar dead, lingered at the porch, wondering what noble Scot could be the subject of lamentation in so lowly an abode. The stopping of these two chieftains impeded the steps of Wallace, who was pressing forward. Kirkpatrick seized the arm of his commander, and pulled him into the cottage. Wallace saw a woman run forward with a light in her hand, the beams of which falling on the face of the knight of Elderslie, with a shriek of joy, she rushed towards him, and threw herself upon his neck.

He instantly recognised Elspa, his nurse—the faithful attendant on his grandfather's declining years—the happy matron who had decked the bridal bed of his Marion—and with an anguish of recollections that almost unmanned him he returned her affectionate embrace.

“Here he lies!” cried the old woman, drawing him towards the rushy bier, and she pulled down the shroud and disclosed the body of Sir Ronald Crawford. Wallace gazed on it with a look of such dreadful import, that Edwin, whose anxious eyes then sought his countenance, trembled with a nameless horror.

“Sad, sad bier, for the good Sir Ronald!” cried the old woman: “a poor wake to mourn the loss of him who was the benefactor of all the country round! But had I not brought him here the salt sea must have been his grave.” Here sobs prevented her utterance; but after a short pause she related that as soon as the woeful tidings were brought to Monkton kirk (and brought too by the Southron who was to take it in possession), she and the clan's-folk who would not swear fealty to the new lord were driven from the house. She hastened to the theatre of massacre, and there beheld the bodies of the murdered chiefs drawn on sledges to the seashore. Elspa knew that of her master by a scar on his breast, which he had received in the battle of Largs. When she saw corse after corse thrown with a careless hand into the waves and the man approach who was to consign the honoured chief of Monkton to the same unhallowed burial, she threw herself frantically on the body, and so moved the man's compassion that he permitted her to wrap the dead Sir Ronald in her plaid, and so carry him away between her sister and herself. But ere she had raised her sacred burden, the man

directed her to seek the venerable head from amongst the others, which lay mingled in a sack ; drawing it forth, she placed it beside the body, and then hastily retired with both to the hovel where Wallace had found her. She had hoped that in so lonely an obscurity, she might have performed without notice a chieftain's rites to the remains of the murdered lord of the very lands on which she wept him. These over, she meant he should be interred in secret by the fathers of a neighbouring church, which he had once richly endowed.

"Ah!" cried she, as she closed the dismal narrative ; "though two lonely women were all they had left of the lately thronged household of Sir Ronald Crawford, to raise the last lament over his body, yet in that sad hour our voices were not alone : the spirits of his daughters hovered in the air, and joined the deep coronach !"

Wallace sighed heavily as he looked on the face of the aged mourner. Attachment to the venerable dead seemed to have inspired her with thoughts beyond her station ; but the heart is an able teacher, and he saw that true affection speaks but one language.

As her eyes withdrew from their heavenward gaze, they fell upon the shrouded face of her master. A napkin concealed the wound of decapitation. "Chiefs," cried she, in a burst of recollection, "ye have not seen all the cruelty of these murderers!" At these words she suddenly withdrew the linen, and lifting up the head, held it towards Wallace. "Here," cried she, "once more kiss these lips! They have often kissed yours when you were a babe, and as insensible to his love as he is now to your sorrow."

Wallace received the head, the long silver beard, thick with gouts of blood, hung over his hands. He gazed on it intently for some minutes. An awful silence pervaded the room : every eye was riveted upon him.

Looking around on his friends, with a countenance whose deadly hue gave a sepulchral fire to the denunciation of his eyes ; "Was it necessary," said he, "to turn my heart to iron, that I was brought to see this sight?" All the tremendous purpose of his soul was read in his face while he laid the head back upon the bier. His lips again moved, but none heard what he said. He rushed from the hut, and, with rapid strides, proceeded in profound silence towards the palace.

He well knew that no honest Scot could be under that roof.

The building, though magnificent, was altogether a structure of wood ; to fire it, then, was his determination. To destroy all, at once, in the theatre of their cruelty—to make an execution, not engage in a warfare of man to man, was his resolution, for they were not soldiers he was seeking, but assassins ; and to pitch his brave Scots in the open field against such wretches would be to dishonour his men, and to give criminals a chance for the lives they had forfeited.

All being quiet in the streets through which he passed, and having set strong bodies of men at the mouth of every sallyport of the citadel, he made a bold attack upon the guard at the barbican-gate ; and, ere they could give the alarm, he and his troops entered the portal, and made direct to the palace. The lights which blazed through the windows of the banqueting-hall showed him to the spot ; and, having detached Graham and Edwin to storm the keep, where their fathers were confined, he took the half-intoxicated sentinels by surprise, and striking them into a sleep from which they would wake no more, he fastened the doors upon the assassins. His men surrounded the building with hurdles filled with combustibles, which they had prepared according to his directions ; and, when all was ready, Wallace mounted to the roof, and tearing off the shingles, with a flaming brand in his hand, showed himself to the affrighted revellers beneath ; and, as he threw it blazing amongst them, he cried aloud, " The blood of the murdered calls for vengeance, and it comes."

At that instant the matches were put to the faggots which surrounded the building, and the party within, springing from their seats, hastened towards the doors. All were fastened on them, and retreating into the midst of the room, they fearfully looked towards the tremendous figure above, which, like a supernatural being, seemed indeed come to rain fire upon their guilty heads. Some shook with superstitious dread, others, driven to despair, again strove to force a passage through the doors. A second glance told De Valence whose was the hand which had launched the thunderbolt at his feet, and, turning to Sir Richard Arnulf, he cried, in a voice of horror, " My arch-enemy is here ! "

Thick smoke rising from within and without the building now obscured his form. The shouts of the Scots as the fire covered its walls, and the flames licking the windows, and pouring into every opening of the building, raised such a

terror in the breasts of the wretches within, that, with the most horrible cries, they again and again flew to the doors to escape.

Aymer de Valence came up at this moment with a wooden pillar, which he and the strongest men in the company had torn from under the gallery that surrounded the room, and dashing it against the great door, they at last drove it from its bolts. But now a wall of men opposed them. Desperate at the sight, and with a burning furnace in their rear, it was not the might of man that could prevent their escape, and with the determination of despair, rushing forward, the foremost rank of the Scots fell. But ere the exulting Southrons could press out into the open space, Wallace himself closed upon them, and Arnulf, whose voice had pronounced the sentence of death upon Sir Ronald Crawford, died beneath his hand.

Wallace was not aware that he had killed the governor of Ayr till the exclamations of his enemies informed him that the instigator of the massacre was slain. This event was welcome news to the Scots, and hoping that the next death would be that of De Valence, they pressed on with redoubled energy.

Aroused by so extraordinary a noise, and alarmed by the flames of the palace, the soldiers quartered near hastened half armed to the spot. But their presence rather added to the confusion than gave assistance to the besieged. They were without leaders; they stood dismayed and irresolute, while their officers were falling in heaps under the swords of the exterminating Scots.

Meanwhile, the men who guarded the prisoners in the keep made a stout resistance there, and one of the officers stole out, and, gathering a company of the scattered garrison, suddenly taking Graham in flank, made no inconsiderable havoc amongst that part of his division. Edwin blew the signal for assistance. Wallace heard the blast, and seeing the day was won at the palace, he left the finishing of the affair to Kirkpatrick and Murray, and, drawing off a small party to reinforce Graham, he took the Southron officer by surprise. The enemy's ranks fell around him like corn beneath the sickle, and grasping a huge battering-ram which his men had found, he burst open the door of the keep. Graham and Edwin rushed in, and Wallace, sounding his own bugle with the notes of victory, his reserves (whom he had placed at the ends of the streets)

entered in every direction, and received the flying soldiers of De Valence upon their pikes.

Dreadful was now the carnage, for the Southrons fought every man for his life, while the furious Scots, driving them into the flames, what escaped the sword would have perished in the fire, had not the relenting heart of Wallace pleaded for humanity, and he ordered the trumpet to sound a parley. He was obeyed ; and, standing on an adjacent mound, in an awful voice he proclaimed that, " whoever had not been accomplices in the horrible massacre of the Scottish chiefs, if they would ground their arms, and take an oath never to serve again against Scotland, their lives would be spared."

Hundreds of swords fell to the ground ; and their late holders took the oath prescribed.

During these momentous events, Graham had deemed it prudent that the noble captives should not come forth to join in the battle ; and not until the sound of victory echoed through their dungeons would he suffer Dundaff to see and thank his deliverer. Meanwhile Edwin appeared before the eyes of his father like the angel who opened the prison gates to Peter. After recounting, in a few hasty sentences, the events which had brought him to be a companion of Sir William Wallace, he knocked off the chains of his amazed father ; accompanied by the happy Lord Ruthven (who gazed with delight on his son, treading so early the path of glory), he hastened around to the other dungeons, and gladly proclaimed to the astonished inmates freedom and safety. Having rid them of their shackles, he had just entered the vaulted chamber, which contained Lord Dundaff, when the clarion sounded. At the joyful tidings Graham started on his feet : " Now, my father, you shall see the bravest of men ! "

" Remember we are twins in happiness ! " cried Edwin : " Our fathers must meet him together." So saying he hastened forward, and entered on the platform just as Wallace stood in the midst of the Southrons receiving their vows of honour.

Morning was spreading over the heavens, and condensing the lurid smoke which still ascended in volumes from the ruins, when Wallace beheld the released nobles. This was the first time he had ever seen the Lords Dundaff and Ruthven, but several of the others he remembered having met at the fatal decision of the crown ; and great was his surprise to see in the person of a prisoner suddenly brought before him, Sir

John Monteith—the young chieftain whom he had parted with a few months ago at Douglas, and from whose fatal invitation to that castle he might date the ruin of his happiness and all the succeeding catastrophe!

“We found Sir John Monteith amongst the slain before the palace,” said Ker; “he of the whole party alone breathed. I knew him instantly. How he came there I know not; but I have brought him hither to explain it himself.” Ker withdrew to finish the interment of the dead. Monteith, still leaning on the arm of a soldier, grasped Wallace’s hand: “My brave friend!” cried he, “to owe my liberty to you is a twofold pleasure; for,” added he, in a lowered voice, “I see before me the man who is to verify the words of Baliol, and be not only the guardian, but the possessor of the treasure he committed to our care.”

Wallace, who had never thought on the coffer since he knew it was under the protection of St. Fillan, shook his head.

“But how,” inquired he, turning to Monteith, “did you happen to be in Ayr at this period? and how, above all, amongst the slaughtered Southrons at the palace?”

Sir John Monteith readily replied: “My adverse fate accounts for all.” He then proceeded to inform Wallace that on the very night in which they parted at Douglas, Sir Arthur Heselrigge was told the story of the box, and accordingly sent to have Monteith brought prisoner to Lanark. He lay in the dungeons of its citadel at the very time Wallace entered that town and destroyed the governor. Though the Scots did not pursue the advantage offered by the panic into which this retribution threw their enemies, care was immediately taken by the English lieutenant to prevent a repetition of the same disaster and, in consequence, every suspected person was seized, and those already in confinement loaded with chains. Monteith, being known as a friend of Wallace, was sent under a strong guard towards Stirling, there to stand his trial before Cressingham and the English justiciary, Ormsby. “By a lucky chance,” said he, “I made my escape, but I was soon retaken by another party and conveyed to Ayr, where the lieutenant-governor Arnulf, discovering my talents for music, compelled me to sing at his entertainments. For this purpose he last night confined me in the banqueting-room at the palace; and thus, when the flames surrounded that building, I found myself exposed to die the death of a traitor, though

then as much oppressed as any other Scot. Snatching up a sword, and striving to join my brave countrymen, the Southrons impeded my passage, and I fell under their arms."

Happy to have rescued his old acquaintance from further indignities, Wallace committed him to Edwin to lead into the citadel. Then taking the colours of Edward from the ground (where the Southron officer had laid them), he gave them to Sir Alexander Scrymgeour, with orders to fill their former stations on the citadel with the standard of Scotland.

The standard was no sooner raised than the clarion of triumph was blown from every instrument in the garrison; and the Southron captain, placing himself at the head of his disarmed troops, under the escort of Murray, marched out of the castle. He announced his design to proceed immediately to Newcastle, and thence embark with his men, to join their king in Flanders.

CHAPTER XXIX.

BERWICK CASTLE.

IN the course of an hour Murray returned from having seen the departing Southrons beyond the barriers of the township. He was accompanied by Lord Auchinleck, the son of one of the betrayed barons who had fallen in the palace of Ayr. This young chieftain, at the head of his vassals, hastened to support the man whose hand had thus satisfied his revenge; and when he met Murray and recognised in his banners a friend of Scotland, he was happy to make himself known to an officer of Wallace, and to be conducted to that chief.

While Lord Andrew and his new colleague were making the range of the suburbs, the glad progress of the victorious Scots had turned the whole aspect of that lately gloomy town. Doors and windows, so recently closed in deep mourning for the sanguinary deeds done in the palace, now opened teeming with smiling inhabitants. The general joy penetrated to the most remote recesses. Mothers threw their arms around the necks of the children whom just before they had regarded with the averted eyes of despair.

Sons who in secret had lamented the death of their fathers, and brothers of their brothers, now opened their gates, and joined the valiant troops in the street.

Thus, then, did Wallace the day after he had entered Ayr, see

all arranged for its peaceful establishment. But ere he bade that town adieu, one duty yet demanded his stay : to pay funeral honours to the remains of his beloved grandfather. Accordingly, the time was fixed ; and with every solemnity due to his virtues and his rank, Sir Ronald Crawford was buried in the chapel of the citadel.

After this solemnity, Wallace called a review of his troops, and found that he could leave five hundred men at Ayr, and march an army of at least two thousand out of it.

His present design was to take his course to Berwick, and, by seizing every castle of strength in his way, form a chain of works across the country which would not only bulwark Scotland against any further inroads from its enemies, but render the subjugation of the interior Southron garrisons more certain and easy.

On the third morning after the conflagration of the palace, Wallace quitted Ayr, and marching over its far-stretching hills, manned every watch-tower on their summits. Whithersoever he moved he found his victories had preceded him, and all turned out to greet and offer him their services. The Southron governors fled at the distant view of his standards ; the flames of Ayr seemed to menace them all ; and castle and fortalice, from Muirkirk to the walls of Berwick, opened their gates before him.

Berwick being a valuable fortress to the enemy, not only as a key to the invaded kingdom, but a point whence by their ships they commanded the whole of the eastern coast of Scotland, Wallace expected that a desperate stand would be made here to stop the progress of his arms. But being aware that the most expeditious mode of warfare was the best adapted to promote his cause, he first took the town by assault, and then, having driven the garrison into the citadel, assailed it by a vigorous siege.

After ten days' hard duty before the walls, Wallace devised a plan to obtain possession of the English ships which commanded the harbour. He found among his own troops many men who had been used to a seafaring life : these he disguised as fugitive Southrons and sent in boats to the enemy's vessels which lay in the roads. The feint took ; and by these means getting possession of those nearest to the town, he manned them with his own people, and going out with them himself, in three days made himself master of every ship on the coast.

By this manœuvre the situation of the besieged was rendered

so hopeless, that no mode of escape was left but by desperate sallies. They made them, but without other effect than weakening their strength and increasing their miseries.

Foiled in every attempt, and losing men at every rencontre, their governor stood without resource. Without provisions, without aid of any kind for his wounded men, and hourly annoyed by the victorious Scots, the unhappy Earl of Gloucester seemed ready to rush on death to avoid the disgrace of surrendering the fortress. Every soul in the garrison was reduced to similar despair. Wallace even found means to dam up the spring which had supplied the citadel with water. The men, famished with hunger, smarting with wounds, and now perishing with thirst, threw themselves at the feet of their officers, imploring them to represent to their royal governor that if he held out longer he must defend the place alone, for they could not exist another day under their present sufferings.

The earl, indeed, repented the rashness with which he had thrown himself unprovisioned into the citadel. He now saw that expectation was no apology for want of precaution. When his first division had been overpowered in the assault on the town, his evil genius suggested that it was best to take the second unbroken into the citadel, and there await the arrival of a reinforcement by sea. But he beheld the ships which had defended the harbour seized by Wallace before his eyes. Hope was then crushed, and nothing but death or dishonour seemed to be his alternatives. Cut to the soul at the consequences of his want of judgment, he determined to retrieve his fame by washing out that error with his blood. To fall under the ruins of Berwick Castle was his resolution. Such was the state of his mind when his officers appeared with the petition from his men, and, in despair, he told them, "they might do as they would, but for his part, the moment they opened the gates to the enemy that moment should be the last of his life. He, that was the son-in-law of King Edward, would never yield his sword to a Scottish rebel."

Terrified at these threats on himself, the soldiers, who loved their general, declared themselves willing to die with him, and, as a last effort, proposed making a mine under the principal tower of the Scots, and by setting fire to it, at least destroy the means by which they feared their enemies might storm the citadel.

As Wallace gave his orders from this commanding station he observed the besieged passing in numbers behind a mound,

in a direction to the tower where he stood, he concluded what was their design, and ordering a counter-mine to be made, Murray, at the head of his miners, encountered those of the castle at the very moment they would have set fire to the combustibles laid to consume the tower. The instant struggle was violent, but short, for the impetuous Scots drove their enfeebled adversaries back into the citadel. At this crisis, Wallace, with a band of resolute men, sprang from the tower upon the wall, and it being almost deserted by its late guards (who had quitted their post to assist in repelling the foe below) he leaped into the midst of the conflict, and the battle became general. It was decisive; for beholding the resolution with which the weakened and dying were supporting the cause their governor was determined to defend to the last, Wallace found his admiration and his pity alike excited; and even when one instant more would make him the undisputed master of the castle (for not a Southron would then breathe to dispute it), he resolved to stop the carnage. At the moment when a gallant officer lay disarmed under him, at that moment when the discomfited knight exclaimed, "In mercy strike, and redeem the honour of Ralph de Monthermer!"* Wallace raised his bugle and sounded the note of peace. Every sword was arrested, and the clangour of battle was hushed in expecting silence.

"Rise, brave earl," cried Wallace to the governor; "I revere virtue too sincerely to take an unworthy advantage of my fortune. The valour of this garrison commands my respect; and as a proof of my sincerity, I grant to it that yourself and these dauntless men march out with the honours of war, and without any bonds on your future conduct towards us. We leave it to your own hearts to decide whether you will ever again be made instruments to enchain a free and brave people."

While he was speaking, De Monthermer leaned gloomily on the sword he had returned to him, with his eyes fixed on his men. They answered his glance with looks that said they understood him; and passing a few words in whispers to each other, one at last spoke aloud: "Decide for us, earl. We are as ready to die as to live, so that in neither we may be divided from you."

At this generous declaration the proud despair of De Monthermer gave way to nobler feelings; and while a tear stood in each eye, he turned to Wallace, and stretching out his hand to

*Ralph de Monthermer, a noble knight who married Jane of Acre, the daughter of King Edward I. He was created Earl of Gloucester on his marriage with that princess.

him, "Noble Scot," said he, "your unexampled generosity, and the invincible fidelity of these heroic men, have compelled me to accept the life I had resolved to lose under these walls rather than resign them. But virtue is resistless, and to it do I surrender that pride of soul which made existence insufferable under the consciousness of having erred. When I became the husband of King Edward's daughter I believed myself pledged to victories or to death. But there is a conquest greater than over hosts in the field; and here taught to make it, the husband of the princess of England, the proud Earl of Gloucester, consents to live to be a monument of Scottish nobleness, and of the fidelity of English soldiers."

"You live, illustrious Englishman," returned Wallace, "to redeem that honour of which too many rapacious sons of England have robbed their country. Go forth, therefore, as my conqueror, for you have in this spot extinguished that antipathy with which the outraged heart of William Wallace had vowed to extirpate every Southron from off this land. If you ever remember William Wallace, let it be as a man who fights, not for conquest nor renown, but to restore Scotland to her rights, and then resign his sword to peace."

"I shall remember you, Sir William Wallace!" returned De Monthermer; "and, as a pledge of it, you shall never see me again in this country till I come an ambassador of that peace for which you fight. Had I not believed that Scotland was unworthy of freedom, I should never have appeared upon her borders; but now that I see she has brave hearts within her, who not only resist oppression, but know how to wield power, I detest the zeal with which I volunteered to rivet her chains. I repeat, that never again shall my hostile foot impress this land."

There they parted. The English bent their course towards London, the Scots returned to their victorious general.

CHAPTER XXX.

STIRLING.

AMONGST the many who hastened to pay their respects to the deliverer of Berwick, was Sir Richard Maitland, of Thirlstane, the *Stalwart Knight of Lauderdale*.* Hearing of Wallace's

* Sir Richard Maitland, of the castle of Thirlstane on the Leeder, is noted in Scottish tradition for his bravery. His valiant defence of his castle against the English in his extreme old age is still the subject of enthusiasm amongst the people of Lauderdale.

mighty deeds, Sir Richard determined to see the brave grandson of his old friend, the treacherously murdered Sir Ronald Crawford. He sought him, not only in this light, but as the champion of Scotland. Months ago he had been informed of Lord Mar's obligations to Wallace, but now, when he found that the resistless chief had not only freed Lord Mar, but had seized the fetters of Scotland at Dumbarton, and had gained possession of the eastern sea, new blood seemed to flow in his aged veins, and he who had not mounted a horse for twenty years, now bestrode a proud charger, to go to pay his duty to the hope of his country.

Wallace was no sooner told of the approach of the venerable chief than he set forth to bid him welcome. At sight of the champion of Scotland, Sir Richard threw himself off his horse, and, hastening towards Wallace, clasped him in his arms.

"I knew Sir Ronald Crawford, and thy valiant father," cried the old knight. "O! had they lived to see this day! But the base murder of the one thou hast nobly avenged, and the grave of the other on Loudon Hill* thou wilt cover with a monument of thine own glories. Low are laid my own children in this land of strife, but in thee I see a son of Scotland that is to dry our tears."

While he thus discoursed, Wallace drew him towards the castle, and there presented to him the two nephews of the Earl of Mar.

He paid some warm compliments to Edwin, and then turning to Murray—"Ay!" said he, "it is joy to me to see the valiant house of Bothwell in the third generation. Thy grandfather and myself were boys together at the coronation of Alexander the Second, and that is eighty years ago. Since then, what have I not seen! the death of two noble Scottish kings! our princes ravished from us by untimely fates: the throne sold to a coward, and at last seized by a foreign power! Two of my sons sleep on the plains of Dunbar; my third, my dauntless William, since that day, has been kept prisoner in England. And my daughters, too, are passed away!"

To give the mourning father time to recover himself, Wallace was moving away when he was met by Ker, bringing information that a youth had just arrived from Stirling, with a sealed packet, which he would not deliver into any hands but those

* Sir Malcolm Wallace, the father of Sir William Wallace, was killed in the year 1295, on Loudon Hill, in a battle with the English.

of Sir William Wallace. Wallace requested his friends to show every attention to the lord of Thirlstane, and then withdrew to meet the messenger.

On his entering the anteroom, the youth sprang forwards, but suddenly checking himself, he stood as if irresolute whom to address.

"This is Sir William Wallace, young man," said Ker ; "deliver your embassy."

At these words the youth pulled a packet from his bosom, and put it into the chief's hand. Wallace gave orders to Ker to take care of him, and then turned to inspect its contents. He wondered from whom it would come, aware of no Scot in Stirling who would dare to write to him while that town was possessed by the enemy. But not losing a moment in conjecture, he broke the seal.

How was he startled at the first words ! and how was every energy of his heart roused to redoubled action when he turned to the signature "Helen Mar !"

"A daughter trembling for the life of her father, presumes to address Sir William Wallace. Alas ! it will be a long letter, for it is to tell of our countless distresses. You have been his deliverer from the sword, from chains, and from the waves. Refuse not to save him again to whom you have so often given life, and hasten to preserve the Earl of Mar from the scaffold.

"A cruel deception brought him from the Isle of Bute, where you imagined you had left him in security. Lord Aymer de Valence, escaping a second time from your sword, fled, under covert of the night, from Ayr to Stirling. Cressingham found in him an apt coadjutor. They concerted how to avenge your late successes ; and Cressingham, eager to enrich himself, while he flattered the resentments of his commander, suggested that you would most easily be made to feel through the bosoms of your friends. These cruel men have therefore determined, by a mock trial, to condemn my father to death, and thus, while they distress you, put themselves in possession of his lands, with the semblance of justice.

"The substance of this most unrighteous debate was communicated to me by De Valence himself.

"Having learnt from some spy that Lord Mar had retired in peaceful obscurity to Bute, these arch enemies to our country sent a body of men disguised as Scots to Gourrock. There they despatched a messenger to inform Lord Mar that Sir William

Wallace was on the banks of the Frith waiting to converse with him. My noble father, unsuspecting of treachery, hurried to the summons. Lady Mar accompanied him, and so both fell into the snare.

"They were brought prisoners to Stirling, where another affliction awaited him—he was to see his daughter and his sister in captivity.

"After I had been betrayed from St. Fillan's monastery by the falsehoods of one Scottish knight, and rescued from his power by the gallantry of another, I sought the protection of my aunt, Lady Ruthven, who then dwelt at Alloa, on the banks of the Forth. Her husband had been invited to Ayr by some treacherous requisition of the governor, Arnulf, and with many other lords were thrown into prison. Report says that you have given freedom to my betrayed uncle.

"The moment Lord Ruthven's person was secured, his estates were seized, and my aunt and myself being found at Alloa, we were carried prisoners to this city. Alas! we had then no valiant arm to preserve us from our enemies! Lady Ruthven's first-born son was slain in the fatal day of Dunbar, and she has placed her eldest surviving boy in a convent.

"Some days after our arrival, my dear father was brought to Stirling. Though a captive in the town, I was not then confined to any closer durance than the walls. While he was yet passing through the streets rumour told my aunt that the Scottish lord then leading to prison was her brother. She flew to me in an agony to tell me the dreadful tidings. I heard no more, saw no more, till, having rushed into the streets, and bursting through every obstacle of crowd and soldiers, I found myself clasped in my father's arms—in his shackled arms!

"What a moment was that!

"My grief and distraction baffled the attempts of the guards to part us, and what became of me I know not till I found myself lying on a couch, attended by my aunt, who told me I was in the apartments of the deputy warden. De Valence himself saw my father contending against the men who would have torn a senseless daughter from his arms, and he separated us, and sent me, with my aunt, a prisoner to his house.

"The next day a packet was put into my aunt's hands, containing a few precious lines from my father to me, also a letter from the countess to Lady Ruthven, full of your goodness to her and to my father, and narrating the cruel manner in which they

had been ravished from the asylum in which you had placed them. She then said that could she find means of apprising you of the danger in which she and her husband are now involved, she would be sure of a second rescue. Whether she has found these means I know not, for all communication between us since the delivery of that letter, has been rendered impracticable. The messenger that brought the packet was a good Southron, who had been won by Lady Mar's entreaties. But on his quitting our apartments he was seized by a servant of De Valence, and on the same day put publicly to death to intimidate all others from the like compassion to the sufferings of unhappy Scotland. Oh ! Sir William Wallace, will not your sword reach these men of blood ?

"In consequence of this circumstance I was made a closer prisoner. But captivity could have no terrors for me, did it not divide me from my father. And, grief on grief ! what words have I to write it ? they have CONDEMNED HIM TO DIE ! That fatal letter of my stepmother's was brought out against him, and as your adherent, Sir William Wallace, they have sentenced him to lose his head !

"I have knelt to Earl de Valence ; I have implored my father's life at his hands, but to no purpose. He tells me that Cressingham and Ormsby declare it necessary that an execution of consequence should be made to appal the discontented Scots ; and that as no lord is more esteemed in Scotland than the Earl of Mar, *he must be the sacrifice*.

"Hasten then to save him ! I shall be on my knees till I hear your trumpet before the walls ; for in you and heaven now rest all the hopes of Helen Mar."

A cold dew stood on the limbs of Wallace as he closed the letter. It might be too late ! The sentence was passed on the earl, and his executioners were prompt as cruel ; the axe might already have fallen !

He called to Ker for the messenger to be brought in. He entered. Wallace inquired how long he had been from Stirling. "Only thirty-four hours," replied the youth, adding that he had travelled night and day for fear the news of the risings in Annandale and the taking of Berwick should precipitate the earl's death.

"I accompany you this instant !" cried Wallace. "Ker, see that the troops get under arms." As he spoke he turned into the room where he had left the knight of Thirlestane.

"Sir Richard Maitland," said he, willing to avoid exciting his alarm, "there is more work for us at Stirling. Lord Aymer de Valence has again escaped the death we thought had overtaken him, and is now in that citadel. I have just received a summons thither, which I must obey." At these words Sir Roger Kirkpatrick gave a shout, and rushed from the apartment. Wallace looked after him for a moment, and then continued—"Follow us with your prayers, Sir Richard, and I shall not despair of sending blessed tidings to the banks of the Leeder."

"What has happened?" inquired Murray, who saw that something more than the escape of De Valence had been imparted to his general.

"We must spare this good old man," returned he, "and have him conducted to his home before I declare it publicly; but the Earl of Mar is again a prisoner, and in Stirling."

Murray, who instantly apprehended his uncle's danger, speeded the departure of Sir Richard, and, as Wallace held his stirrup, the chief laid his hand on his head and blessed him. "The seer of Ercildown is too ill to bring his benediction himself, but I breathe it over this heroic brow!" Wallace bowed his head, and Lord Andrew led the horses out of the eastern gate of the town, where, taking leave of the veteran knight, he soon rejoined his commander, whom he found in the midst of his chieftains.

He had informed them of the Earl of Mar's danger, and the policy as well as justice of rescuing so powerful a nobleman from execution. Lord Ruthven needed no arguments to precipitate him to the assistance of his brother and his wife; and the anxieties of the affectionate Edwin were all awake when he knew that his mother was a prisoner. Lord Andrew smiled proudly when he returned his cousin's letter to Wallace. "We shall have the rogue on the nail yet," cried he; "my uncle's head is not ordained to fall by the stroke of such a coward!"

"So I believe," replied Wallace; and then turning to Lord Dundaff—"My lord," said he, "I leave you governor of Berwick."

The veteran warrior grasped Wallace's hand. "To be your representative in this fortress is the proudest station I have ever filled. My son must be my representative with you in the field." He waved Sir John Graham towards him: the young knight advanced, and Lord Dundaff, placing his son's

hands upon his target, continued, "Swear, that as this defends the body, you will ever strive to cover Scotland from her enemies, and that from this hour you will be the faithful friend and follower of Sir William Wallace."

"I swear," returned Graham, kissing the shield. Wallace pressed his hand. "I have brothers around me rather than what the world calls friends! And with such fidelity to aid me, can I be otherwise than victor? Heaven's anointed sword is with such fellowship!"

Edwin who stood near, softly whispered to Wallace, "But amongst all these brothers cease not to remember Edwin the youngest and the least. Ah, my beloved general, what Jonathan was to David I would be to thee!"

Wallace's heart was suddenly wrung by a recollection which the words of Edwin had recalled. "But thy *love, Edwin, passes not the love of woman.*" "But it equals it," replied he, "what has been done for thee I would do, only love me as David did Jonathan, and I shall be the happiest of the happy." "Be happy then, dear boy!" answered Wallace; "for all that ever beat in human breast, for friend, or brother, lives in my heart for thee."

At that moment Sir John Graham rejoined them, and some other captains coming up, Wallace made the proper military dispositions, and every man took his station at the head of his division.

Until the men had marched far beyond the chance of rumours reaching Thirlestane, they were not informed of the Earl of Mar's danger. They conceived their present errand was the recapture of De Valence.

It was noon when they set forth. The veteran band which Wallace had brought from Dumbarton led the way, while an army of five thousand men, officered by the bravest chieftains of the Merse, Tweeddale, and the Lothians, followed, with streaming banners, across Lauderdale to Lammermuir. At the top of Soutra Hill, Wallace halted, and there informed his soldiers of Lord Mar's perilous situation, and of the necessity for forced marches, if they would save Scotland from the disgrace of allowing one of her bravest nobles to die by the hand of the executioner.

Sir Roger Kirkpatrick had been the first to fly to arms on the march to Stirling being mentioned: and when Wallace stood forward to declare that rest should be dispensed with till

Stirling fell, the ardent knight, full of a fierce joy that seemed to see his revenge and redeemed honour at once in his grasp, darted over every obstacle to reach his aim.

The shouts of the men, who seemed to drink in the spirit that blazed from Kirkpatrick's eyes, made the echoes of Lammermuir ring. The eager van led the way ; and, with prodigious perseverance, dragging their war-machines in the rear, the rest pressed on, till they reached the Carron side. At the moment the foaming steed of Wallace was plunging into the stream to take the ford, Ker snatched the bridle of the horse—"My lord," cried he, "a man on full speed from Douglas Castle has brought this packet."

In his march from Ayr, Wallace had left Sir Eustace Maxwell governor of the castle, and Monteith as his lieutenant.

Wallace opened the packet and read as follows :—

"The patriots in Annandale have been beaten by Lord de Warrenne. Sir John Monteith is taken prisoner with twelve hundred men.

"Earl de Warrenne comes to resume his arrogant title of Lord Warden of Scotland, and thereby to relieve his deputy, Aymer de Valence, who is recalled to take possession of the lordship of Pembroke. In pursuance of his commission the earl is now marching rapidly towards the Lothians, in the hope of intercepting you in your progress.

"Thanks to the constant information you send us of your movements for being enabled to apprise you of this danger ! I should have attempted to check the Southron had not his numbers rendered such an enterprise on my part hopeless. But his aim being to come up with you, if you meet him in the van, we shall have him in the rear ; and, so surrounded, he must be cut to pieces. Surely the tree you planted in Dumbarton is not now to be blasted !—Ever my general's and Scotland's true servant,
EUSTACE MAXWELL."

"What answer ?" inquired Ker.

Wallace hastily engraved with his dagger's point upon his gauntlet, "*Reviresco* !* Our sun is above !" and desiring it might be given to the messenger to carry to Sir Eustace Maxwell, he refixed himself in his saddle, and spurred over the Carron.

The moon was near her meridian as the wearied troops halted

* *Reviresco*, I means "I bud again !" This encouraging word is now the motto of the Maxwell arms.

on the deep shadows of the Carse of Stirling. All around them was desolation; the sword and the fire had been there; hence, from the base of the rock, even to the foot of the Clackmannan Hills, all lay a smoking wilderness.

An hour's rest was sufficient to restore every exhausted power to the limbs of the determined followers of Wallace; and, as the morning dawned, the sentinels on the ramparts of the town were not only surprised to see a host below, but that part had not merely passed the ditch, but having gained the counterscarp, had fixed their movable towers, and were at that instant overlooking the highest bastions. The mangonels and petraries, and other implements for battering walls, and the balista with every efficient means of throwing missive weapons, were ready to discharge their artillery upon the heads of the besieged.

At a sight so unexpected, the Southrons fled a moment from the walls; but immediately recovering their presence of mind, they returned, and discharged a cloud of arrows upon their assailants. A messenger, meanwhile, was sent into the citadel, to apprise De Valence and the Governor Cressingham of the assault. The interior gates now sent forth thousands to the walls; but in proportion to the numbers which approached, the greater was the harvest of death prepared for the terrible arm of Wallace, whose tremendous war-wolfs throwing prodigious stones, and lighter springalls, casting forth brazen darts, swept away file after file of the reinforcements. It grieved the Scottish commander to see so many valiant men urged to destruction; but still they advanced, and that his own might be preserved they must fall. To shorten the bloody contest, his weapons were working with redoubled energy; and so mortal a shower fell that the heavens seemed to rain iron. The crushed and stricken army forsook their ground.

The ramparts deserted, Wallace sprung from his tower upon the walls. At that moment De Valence opened one of the gates, and at the head of a formidable body, charged the nearest Scots. A good soldier is never taken unawares, and Murray and Graham were prepared to receive him. Furiously they forced him back into the town. But there was all confusion. Wallace with his resolute followers had already put Cressingham and his legions to flight; and, closely pursued by Kirkpatrick, they threw themselves into the castle. Meanwhile, Wallace surrounded the amazed De Valence, who, caught in

double toils, called to his men to fight for their king, and neither give nor take quarter.

The brave fellows too strictly obeyed ; and while they fell on all sides, he supported them with desperate courage. At last he encountered the conquering chief arm to arm. Great was the dismay of De Valence at this meeting ; but as death was now all he saw before him, he resolved, if he must die, that the soul of his enemy should attend him to the other world.

He fought with the fury of despair, with the violence of a hyena thirsting for the blood of her opponent. Drunk with rage he made a desperate plunge at the heart of Wallace, but his sword missed its aim, and entered the side of a youth who at that moment had thrown himself before his general. Wallace saw where the deadly blow fell ; and instantly closing on the earl, the incensed chief hurled him to the ground, and, setting his foot upon his breast, would have buried his dagger there had not De Valence dropped his sword, and raised his clasped hands in supplication.

“ My life ! this once again, gallant Wallace ! by your hopes of heaven grant me mercy ! ”

Wallace looked on the trembling recreant with a glance, which, had he possessed the soul of a man, would have made him grasp at death rather than deserve a second. “ And hast thou escaped me again ? ” cried Wallace. Then turning his indignant eyes from the abject earl to his bleeding friend—“ I yield him his life, Edwin, and you, perhaps, are slain ? ”

“ He has only wounded me,” said Edwin. “ But you are safe, and I hardly feel a smart.”

Wallace replaced his dagger in his girdle. “ Rise, Lord de Valence ; it is my honour, not my will, that grants your life. You threw away your arms ! I cannot strike even a murderer who bares his breast. I give you that mercy you denied to nineteen unoffending, defenceless, old men, whose hoary heads your ruthless axe brought with blood to the ground. Let memory be the sword I have withheld.”

While he spoke, De Valence had risen, and stood, conscience-stricken, before Wallace. There was something in this denunciation that sounded like the irreversible decree of a divinity ; and the condemned wretch quaked beneath the threat, while he panted for revenge.

The whole of the survivors in De Valence's train having surrendered themselves when their leader fell, in a few minutes

Wallace was surrounded by his chieftains, bringing in the colours and the swords of their prisoners.

"Sir Alexander Ramsay," said he, to a brave and courteous knight, who, with his kinsman, William Blair, had joined him in the Lothians; "I confide Earl de Valence to your care. See that he is strongly guarded, and has every respect, according to the honour of him to whom I commit this charge."

The gates were firmly closed, and Cressingham was panting behind the citadel walls, as Wallace commanded the parley to be sounded. Afraid of trusting himself within arrow-shot of an enemy, who, he believed, conquered by withcraft, the terrified governor sent his lieutenant up on the walls to answer the summons.

The herald of the Scots demanded the immediate surrender of the place. Cressingham was at that instant informed by a messenger that De Warenne was approaching with an immense army. Inflated with new confidence, he mounted the wall himself, and in haughty language returned for answer, "That he would fall under the towers of the citadel before he would surrender to a Scottish rebel. And as an example of the fate which such a delinquent merits," continued he, "I will change the milder sentence passed on Lord Mar, and immediately hang him, and all his family, on these ramparts in sight of your insurgent army."

"Then," cried the herald, "thus says Sir William Wallace—If even one hair on the heads of the Earl of Mar and his family falls with violence to the ground, every Southron who has this day surrendered to the Scottish arms shall lose his head by the axe."

"We are used to the blood of traitors," cried Cressingham, "and mind not its scent. But the army of Earl de Warenne is at hand, and it is at the peril of all your necks, for the rebel, your master, to put this threat into execution. Withdraw, or you shall see the dead bodies of Donald Mar and his family fringing these battlements, for no terms do we keep with man, woman, or child, who is linked with treason!"

At these words, an arrow winged from a hand behind Cressingham, flew directly to the unvisored face of Wallace, but it struck too high, and ringing against his helmet fell to the ground.

"Treachery!" resounded from every Scottish lip; while indignant at so villainous a rupture of the parley, every bow was drawn to the head, and a flight of arrows, armed with

retribution, flew towards the battlements. All hands were now at work, to bring the towers to the wall, and while the archers drove the men from the ramparts, soldiers below, with pickaxes, dug into the wall to make a breach.

Cressingham began to fear that his auxiliaries might arrive too late; but, determining to gain time at least, he shot flights of darts and large stones, from a thousand engines; also discharged burning combustibles over the ramparts, in hopes of setting fire to the enemy's attacking machines.

But all his promptitude proved of no effect. The walls were giving way in parts, and Wallace was mounting by scaling ladders, and clasping the parapets with bridges from his towers. Driven to extremity, Cressingham resolved to try the attachment of the Scots for Lord Mar; and even at the moment when their chief had seized the barbican and outer ballium, ordered the earl to be brought out upon the wall of the inner ballia. A rope was round his neck, which was instantly run through a groove that projected from the nearest tower.

At this sight horror froze the blood of Wallace. But the intrepid earl, descrying his friend on the ladder which might soon carry him to the summit of the battlement, exclaimed, "Forward! Let not my life stand between my country and this glorious day for Scotland's freedom!"

"Execute the sentence!" cried the infuriate Cressingham.

At these words, Murray and Edwin precipitated themselves upon the ramparts, and mowed down all before them in a direction towards their uncle. The lieutenant who held the cord, aware of the impolicy of the cruel mandate, hesitated to fulfil it; and now, fearing a rescue from the impetuous Scots, hurried his victim off the works back to his position. Meanwhile, Cressingham perceiving that all would be lost should he suffer the enemy to gain this wall also, sent such numbers upon the brave Scots who had followed the cousins, that, overcoming some, and repelling others, they threw Murray, with a sudden shock, over the ramparts. Edwin was surrounded, and his successful adversaries were bearing him off, struggling and bleeding, when Wallace, springing like a lioness on hunters carrying away her young, rushed in singly amongst them. He seized Edwin and fought his passage to one of the wooden towers he had fastened to the wall.

Cressingham, wounded in the head, commanded a parley to be sounded.

"We have already taken Lord de Valence and his host prisoners," returned Wallace; "and we grant you no cessation of hostilities till you deliver up the Earl of Mar and his family, and surrender the castle into our hands."

"Think not, proud boaster!" cried the herald of Cressingham, "that we ask a parley to conciliate. It was to tell you that if you do not draw off directly, not only the Earl of Mar and his family, but every Scottish prisoner within these walls, shall perish in your sight."

While he yet spoke the Southrons uttered a great shout, and the Scots looking up, beheld several high poles erected on the roof of the keep, and the Earl of Mar, as before, was led forward. But he seemed no longer the bold and tranquil patriot. He was surrounded by shrieking female forms, and his hands were lifted to heaven as if imploring its pity.

"Stop!" cried Wallace, in a voice whose thundering mandate rang from tower to tower. "The instant he dies, Lord Aymer de Valence shall perish."

He had only to make the sign, and in a few minutes that nobleman appeared between Ramsay and Kirkpatrick. "Earl" exclaimed Wallace, "though I granted your life in the field with reluctance, yet here I am ashamed to put it in danger. But your own people compel me. Look on that spectacle! A venerable father in the midst of his family; he and they doomed to an ignominious and instant death, unless I betray my country and abandon these walls! Were I weak enough to purchase their lives at such an expense, they could not survive that disgrace. But that they shall not die, while I have the power to preserve them, is my resolve and my duty! Life then for life: yours for this family!"

Wallace directed his voice towards the keep: "The moment in which that cord presses too closely on the neck of the Earl of Mar, or any of his blood, the axe shall sever the head of Lord de Valence from his body."

De Valence was now seen on the top of one of the besieging towers. He was pale as death. He trembled, but not with dismay only; ten thousand varying emotions tore his breast. To be thus set up as a monument of his own defeat, to be threatened with execution by an enemy he had contemned, to be exposed to such indignities by the unthinking ferocity of his colleague, filled him with such contending passions of revenge against friends and foes, that he forgot the present fear of

death in turbulent wishes to deprive of life all by whom he suffered.

Cressingham became alarmed on seeing the retaliating menace of Wallace brought so directly before his view ; and dreading the vengeance of De Valence's powerful family, he ordered a herald to say, that if Wallace would draw off his troops to the outer ballium, and the English chief along with them, the Lord Mar and his family should be taken from their perilous situation, and he would consider terms of surrender.

Aware that Cressingham only wanted to gain time until De Warenne should arrive, Wallace determined to foil him with his own weapons, and make the gaining of the castle the consequence of vanquishing the earl. He told the now perplexed governor that he should consider Lord de Valence as the hostage of safety for Lord Mar and his family, and therefore he consented to withdraw his men from the inner ballium till the setting of the sun, at which hour he should expect a herald with the surrender of the fortress.

Thinking that he had caught the Scottish chief in a snare, and that the lord warden's army would be upon him before the expiration of the armistice, Cressingham congratulated himself upon this manœuvre ; and resolving that the moment Earl de Warenne should appear Lord Mar should be secretly destroyed in the dungeons, he ordered him to their security again.

Wallace fully comprehended what were his enemy's views, and what ought to be his own measures, as soon as he saw the unhappy group disappear from the battlements of the keep. He then recalled his men from the inner ballium wall, and stationing several detachments along the ramparts, and in the towers of the outer wall, committed De Valence to the stronghold of the barbican, under the especial charge of Lord Ruthven, who was eager to hold the means in his own hand that were to check the threatened danger of relatives so dear to him as were the prisoners in the castle.

CHAPTER XXXI.

CAMBUS-KENNETH.

HAVING secured the advantages he had gained by manning all the strong places, Wallace set forward to intercept De Warenne.

He took his position on a commanding ground, about half a mile from Stirling, near to the abbey of Cambus-Kenneth.

The Forth lay before him, crossed by a wooden bridge, over which the enemy must pass to reach him, the river not being fordable in that part.

He ordered the timbers which supported the bridge to be sawed at the bottom, but not displaced, that they might stand firm for as long as he should deem necessary. To these timbers were fastened strong cords, all of which he entrusted to the sturdiest of his Lanark men, who were to lie concealed amongst the flags. These preparations being made, he drew up his troops in order of battle. Kirkpatrick and Murray commanded the flanks. In the centre stood Wallace himself, with Ramsay on one side of him, and Edwin, with Scrymgeour on the other, awaiting with steady expectation the approach of the enemy.

Cressingham was not less well-informed of the advance of De Warenne; and burning with revenge against Wallace, and earnest to redeem the favour of De Valence by some act in his behalf, he first gave secret orders to his lieutenant, then set forth alone to seek an avenue of escape never divulged to any but to the commanders of the fortress. He soon discovered it, and making his way through a passage bored in the rock, emerged at its western base, screened from sight by bushes. He had disguised himself in a shepherd's bonnet and plaid, in case of being observed by the enemy; but fortune favoured him, and he crept along through the thickets till he descried the advance of De Warenne's army on the skirts of Torwood.

Having missed Wallace in West Lothian, De Warenne divided his army into three divisions, to enter Stirlingshire by different routes, and so he hoped, certainly, to intercept him in one of them. The Earl of Montgomery led the first, of twenty thousand men; the barons Hilton and Blenkinsopp, the second, of ten thousand; and De Warenne himself the third, of thirty thousand.

It was the first of these divisions that Cressingham encountered in Torwood; and revealing himself to Montgomery, he recounted how rapidly Wallace had gained the town, and in what jeopardy the citadel would be if he were not instantly attacked. The earl advised waiting for a junction with Hilton or the lord warden, "which," said he, "must happen in the course of a few hours."

"In the course of a few hours," returned Cressingham, "you will have no Stirling Castle to defend. The enemy will seize it at sunset, in pursuance of the very agreement by which I

warded him off, to give us time to annihilate him before that hour.

By arguments such as these the young earl was induced to give up his judgment; and, accompanied by Cressingham, whose courage revived amid such a host, he proceeded to the southern bank of the Forth.

The bands of Wallace were drawn up on the opposite shore, hardly five thousand strong, but so disposed, the enemy could not calculate their numbers, though the narrowness of their front suggested that they could not be numerous, and that many must have been left to occupy the outworks of the town and the citadel.

Montgomery proposed a herald being sent to inform Wallace that, besides the troops he saw, De Warenne was advancing with double hosts, and if he would now surrender, a pardon should be granted to him and his, in the king's name, for all their late rebellions. Cressingham was vehement against this measure, but Montgomery being resolute, the messenger was despatched.

In a few minutes he returned, and repeated the words of Wallace: "Go, tell your masters we came not here to treat for a pardon of what we shall never allow to be an offence: we came to assert our rights; to set Scotland free. Till that is effected, all negotiation is vain. Let them advance, they will find us prepared."

"Then onward!" cried Montgomery; and spurring his steed, he led the way to the bridge; his eager soldiers followed, and the whole of his centre ranks passed over. The flanks advanced; and the bridge was filled with archers, cavalry, men-at-arms, and war-carriages. Cressingham in the midst, was hallooing in proud triumph when the blast of a trumpet sounded from the Scottish phalanx. It was re-echoed by shouts from behind the passing enemy—and in that moment the supporting piers of the bridge* were pulled away, and the whole of its mailed throng was precipitated into the stream.

In the midst of this conflict, which rather seemed a carnage than a battle, Kirkpatrick, having heard the proud shouts of Cressingham on the bridge, now sought him amidst its shattered timbers. With the ferocity of a tiger hunting his prey, he ran from man to man, and as the struggling wretches

* This historical fact is yet exultingly repeated on the spot, and the number of the Southrons who fell beneath the arms of so small a band of Scots is not less the theme of triumph.

emerged from the water, he plucked them from the surge ; but even while his glaring eyeballs and uplifted axe threatened destruction, he only looked on them ; and with imprecations of disappointment, rushed forward on his chase. Almost in despair that the waves had cheated his revenge, he was hurrying on in another direction, when he perceived a body moving through a hollow on his right. He turned and saw the object of his search crawling amongst the mud and sedges.

"Ha !" cried Kirkpatrick, with a triumphant yell, "art thou yet mine ? Damned, damned villain !" cried he, springing upon his breast : "Behold the man you dishonoured !—behold the cheek your dastard hand defiled ! Thy blood shall obliterate the stain, and then Kirkpatrick may again front the proudest in Scotland !"

"For mercy !" cried Cressingham, struggling to extricate himself.

"Hell would be my portion did I grant any to thee," cried Kirkpatrick ; and with one stroke of his axe he severed the head from its body. "I am a man again," shouted he, as he held its bleeding veins in his hand, and placed it on the point of his sword. "Thou ruthless priest of Moloch and of Mammon, thou shalt have thine own blood to drink, while I show how I am avenged !" As he spoke, he dashed amongst the victorious ranks, and reached Wallace at the very moment he was freeing himself from his horse, which a random arrow had shot under him. Murray, at the same instant, was bringing up the wounded Montgomery, who came to surrender his sword, and to beg quarter for his men. The earl turned deadly pale, for the first object that struck his sight was the fierce knight of Torthorald, walking under the stream of blood which continued to flow from the ghastly head of Cressingham, as he held it exultingly in the air.

"If that be your chief," cried Montgomery, "I have mistaken him much—I cannot yield my sword to him."

Murray understood him—"If cruelty be an evil spirit," returned he, "it has fled every breast in this army to shelter with Sir Roger Kirkpatrick, and its name is Legion ! That is my chief !" added he, pointing to Wallace, with an evident consciousness of deriving honour from his command. The chief rose from the ground dyed in the same hue which had excited the abhorrence of Montgomery, though it had been drawn from his own veins and those of his horse. All

indeed of blood about him seemed to be on his garments : none was in his eyes, none in his heart, but what warmed it to mercy and to benevolence for all mankind. His eye fell on Kirkpatrick, who, waving the head in the air, blew from his bugle the triumphant notes of the Pryse, and then cried to his chief : “ I have slain the wolf of Scotland ! My brave clansmen are now casing my target with his skin,* which will cry aloud, ‘ So perishes thy dishonour ! So perish all the enemies of Scotland ! ’ ”

“ And with the extinction of that breath, Kirkpatrick,” cried Wallace, looking sternly from the head to him, “ let your fell revenge perish also. For your own honour commit no indignities on the body you have slain.”

“ ’Tis for you to conquer like a god ! ” cried Kirkpatrick, “ I have felt as a man, and like a man I revenge. This head shall destroy even in death : it shall vanquish its friends for me, for I will wear it like a Gorgon on my sword, to turn to stone every Southron who looks on it.” While speaking, he disappeared amongst the thickening ranks, and as the victorious Scots hailed him in passing, Montgomery, thinking of his perishing men, suffered Murray to lead him to the scene of humility.

Wallace perceived him as he advanced ; and guessing by his armour and dignified demeanour who he was, he raised his helmed bonnet from his head when the earl approached him. Montgomery looked on him ; he felt his soul even more than his arms, subdued ; but still there was something about a soldier’s heart that shrunk from yielding his power of resistance. The blood mounted into his cheeks ; he held out his sword in silence to the victor, for he could not bring his tongue to pronounce the word “ surrender.”

Wallace understood the sign, and holding up his hand to a herald, the trumpet of peace was raised. It sounded, and all was hushed as death. None spoke ; not a sound was heard but the low groans of the dying, who lay beneath the bodies of the slain and the feet of the living.

The voice of Wallace rose from this awful pause. “ Soldiers ! ” cried he, “ God has given victory—let us show our gratitude by moderation and mercy. Gather the wounded into quarters, and bury the dead.”

* It is recorded that the memory of Cressingham was so odious to the Scots, they did indeed flay his dead body, and make saddles and girths and other things, of his skin.

Wallace then turned to the extended sword of the earl : he put it gently back with his hand—" Ever wear what you honour," said he ; " but, gallant Montgomery, when you draw it next, let it be in a better cause. Learn to discriminate between a warrior's glory and his shame ; between the defender of his country and the unprovoked ravager of other lands."

Montgomery blushed scarlet at these words, but it was not with resentment. He looked down for a moment—" Ah !" thought he, " perhaps I ought never to have drawn it here." Then raising his eyes to Wallace he said : " Were you not the enemy of my king, who, though a conqueror, sanctions none of the cruelties that have been committed in his name, I would give you my hand before the remnant of his brave troops, whose lives you grant. But you have my heart—a heart that knows no difference between friend or foe, when the bonds of virtue would unite what only civil dissensions hold separate."

" Had your king possessed the virtues you believe he does," replied Wallace, " my sword might now have been a pruning-hook. But that is past. We are in arms for injuries received, and to drive out a tyrant. For, believe me, that monarch has little pretensions to virtue who suffers the oppressors of his people or of his conquests to go unpunished. To connive at cruelty is to practise it. And has Edward ever frowned on one of those despots who, in his name, have for these two years past, laid Scotland in blood and ashes ? "

The appeal was too strong for Montgomery to answer ; he felt its truth, and bowed, with an expression that told more than he dared declare.

The prisoners were conducted to the rear of Stirling, while the major part of the Scots returned in front of the gates just as De Warne's division appeared on the horizon, like a moving cloud gilded by the now setting sun. At this sight Wallace sent Edwin into the town with Lord Montgomery, and marshalling his line, prepared to bear down upon the approaching earl.

But the lord warden had received information which fought better for the Scots than a host of swords. When advanced a very little onward on the Carse of Stirling, one of his scouts brought intelligence that, having approached the south side of the Forth, he had seen that river floating with dead bodies ; and soon after met Southron soldiers in full flight, while he heard from afar the Scottish horns blowing

the notes of victory. From what he learned from the fugitives, he also informed his lord, "that not only the town and citadel of Stirling were in the possession of Sir William Wallace, but the two detachments under Montgomery and Hilton had both been discomfited, and their leaders slain or taken."

These accounts persuaded De Warenne to make a retreat: and intimidated by the exaggerated representations of those who had fled, his men turned to obey.

Wallace perceived the retrograde motion of his enemy's lines; and while a stream of arrows from his archers poured upon them like hail, he bore down upon the rear-guard with his cavalry and men-at-arms, and sent Graham round by the wood to surprise the flanks.

All was executed with promptitude; and the slogan sounding from side to side, the Southrons, before in confusion, now threw away their arms to lighten themselves for escape. Sensible that it is not the number of the dead, but the terror of the living, which gives the finishing stroke to conquest, De Warenne saw the effects of this panic in the total disregard of his orders, and dreadfulness would have been the carnage of his troops had he not sounded a parley.

The bugle of Wallace instantly answered it. De Warenne sent forward his herald. He offered to lay down his arms provided he might be exempted from relinquishing the royal standard, and that he and his men might be permitted to return without delay into England.

Wallace accepted the first article, granted the second, but with regard to the third, it must be on condition that he, the Lord de Warenne, and the officers taken in his army, or in other engagements lately fought in Scotland, should be immediately exchanged for the like number of noble Scots Wallace should name, who were prisoners in England, and that the common men of the army, now about to surrender their arms should take an oath never to serve again against Scotland.

These preliminaries being agreed to, the lord warden advanced at the head of his thirty thousand troops; and first laying down his sword, which Wallace immediately returned to him, the officers and soldiers marched by with their heads uncovered, throwing down their weapons as they approached their conqueror. Wallace extended his line while the procession moved, for he had too much policy to show his enemies

that thirty thousand men had yielded, almost without a blow, to scarce five thousand. The oath was afterwards administered to each regiment, by heralds, sent for that purpose into the strath of Monteith, whither Wallace had directed the captured legions to assemble and refresh themselves, previous to their departure next morning for England. The privates thus disposed of, Wallace told De Warenne that duty called him away, but every respect would be paid to them by the Scottish officers.

He then gave directions to Sir Alexander Ramsay to escort De Warenne and the rest of the noble prisoners to Stirling. Wallace himself turned with his veteran band to give a conqueror's greeting to the baron of Hilton; and so ended the famous battles of Cambus-Kenneth and the Carse of Stirling.

CHAPTER XXXII.

STIRLING CASTLE.

THE prisoners who had been taken with Montgomery were lodged behind the town, and the wounded carried into the abbey of Cambus-Kenneth; but when Edwin came to move that earl himself, he found him too faint with loss of blood to sit on a horse to Snawdoun. He therefore ordered a litter, and so conveyed his brave prisoner to that palace of the kings of Scotland in Stirling.

Messengers, meanwhile, arrived from Wallace, acquainting his chieftains in Stirling with the surrender of De Warenne's army. Hence no surprise was created in the breast of the wounded earl when he saw his commander enter the palace a prisoner.

Montgomery held out his hand to the lord warden in silence with a flushed cheek.

"Your wounds," cried De Warenne, "speak more eloquently than a thousand tongues, the gallantry with which you maintained the sword that fate compelled you to surrender! But I, without a scratch, how can I meet Edward? And yet it was not for myself I feared: my soldiers were in all my thoughts, for I saw it was not to meet an army I led them, but against a whirlwind, a storm of war, with which no strength that I commanded could contend."

While the English generals conversed, Edwin yearned to be again at the side of Wallace; and gladly resigning the

charge of his prisoner to Sir Alexander Ramsay, he drew near Montgomery to take his leave.

"Farewell, till we meet again!" said the young earl, pressing his hand: "You have been a young brother rather than an enemy to me."

"Because," returned Edwin, "I follow the example of my general, who would willingly be the friend of all mankind."

Warrenne looked at him with surprise: "And who are you, who, in that stripling form, utters sentiments which might grace the maturest years?"

"I am Edwin Ruthven, the adopted brother of Sir William Wallace," Edwin replied.

"And the son of him," asked De Warrenne, "who, with Sir William Wallace, was the first to mount Dumbarton walls?"

At the moment when his courage was distinguished on the heights of Dumbarton by the avowed friendship of Wallace, Edwin had found himself beloved by the bravest and most amiable of beings, and in his light he felt both warmth and brightness; but this question of De Warrenne conveyed to him that he had found fame himself; that he was there publicly acknowledged to be an object not unworthy of being called the brother of Sir William Wallace!—and, beaming with exultation, he answered, "I am that happy Ruthven who had the honour to mount Dumbarton Rock by the side of my general, and from his hand there received the stroke of knighthood."

De Warrenne rose much agitated: "If such be the boys of Scotland, need we wonder, when the spirit of resistance is roused in the nation, that our strength should wither before its men?"

"At least," said Montgomery, "it deprives defeat of its sting, when we are conscious we yielded to a power that was irresistible. But, my lord," added he, "if the courage of this youth amazes you, what will you say ought to be the fate of this country? what to be the crown of Sir William Wallace's career, when you know the chain of brave hearts by which he is surrounded? Even tender woman loses the weakness of her sex when she belongs to him." Earl de Warrenne, surprised at the energy with which he spoke, looked at him with an expression that told him so. "Yes," continued he, "I witnessed the heroism of Lady Wallace, when she defended the character of her husband in the midst of an armed host,

and preserved the secret of his retreat inviolate. I saw that loveliest of women whom the dastard Heselrigge slew."

"If you were a spectator of that bloody deed," cried Edwin, with indignant vehemence, "retire from this house; go to Cambus-Kenneth—anywhere, but leave this city before Wallace arrives; blast not his eyes with a second sight of one who could have beheld his wife murdered."

Every eye was now fixed on Edwin, who stood with the determination of being obeyed breathing in every look. De Warenne then at once saw the possibility of so gentle a creature being transformed into the soul of enterprise, into the fearless and effective soldier.

Lord Montgomery held out his hand. "By this right arm I swear that had I been on the spot when Heselrigge lifted his sword against Lady Wallace, I would have sheathed my sword in him. It was before then that I saw that matchless woman; and offended with my want of severity in the scrutiny I had made at Elderslie for its chief, Heselrigge sent me back to Ayr. Arnulf quarrelled with me there on the same subject, and I immediately retired in disgust to England."

"Then you ought to be Sir Gilbert Hambledon?" replied Edwin; "but whoever you are, as you were kind to the Lady Marion, I cannot but regret my late hasty charge, for which I beseech your pardon."

Montgomery took his hand and pressed it. "Your warmth is too honourable to need forgiveness, Ruthven. I am Sir Gilbert Hambledon, and had I remained so I should not now be in Scotland. But in my first interview with the Prince of Wales, after my accession to the Earldom of Montgomery, his highness told me it had been rumoured from Scotland that I was disloyal in my heart to my king. 'And to prove the falsehood of such calumniators,' continued the prince, 'I appoint you second in command there to the Earl de Warenne.' To have refused to fight against Sir William Wallace would have been to have accused myself of treason. And while I respected the husband of the murdered Lady Marion, I yet condemned him as an insurgent; and with the same spirit you follow him to the field, I obeyed the commands of my sovereign."

"I am rejoiced to see one who proves to me that all the Southrons are not base and cruel!" returned Edwin. "When my general knows who is his prisoner, what recollections will it

awaken ! But till you and he again meet, I shall not intimate to him the melancholy satisfaction he is to enjoy, for with the remembrances it will arouse, your presence must bring the antidote."

The youth then descended to the courtyard to take horse for Torwood. He was galloping along, under the bright light of the moon, when he heard a squadron on full speed approaching, and presently Murray appeared at its head.

"Hurrah, Edwin !" cried he ; " well met ! We come to demand the instant surrender of the citadel. Hilton's division has surrendered ! "

The instant Hilton put his argent banner into the victor's hand, Wallace knew that the castle must be his ; he had discomfited all who could have maintained it against him. Impatient to apprise Lord Mar and his family of their safety, he despatched Murray with a considerable escort to demand its surrender.

Murray gladly obeyed, and now, accompanied by Edwin, with the standards of Cressingham and De Warenne trailing in the dust, he arrived before the castle, and summoned the lieutenant to the walls. But that officer, well aware of what was going to happen, feared to appear. From the battlements of the keep he had seen the thousands of De Warenne pass before the conqueror. To punish his treachery in not only having suffered Cressingham to steal out under the armistice, but upholding also the breaking of his word to surrender at sunset, the terrified officer believed that Wallace was now come to put the whole garrison to the sword.

At the first sight of Murray's approaching squadron, the lieutenant hurried to Lord Mar, to offer him immediate liberty if he would go forth to Wallace and treat with him to spare the lives of the garrison. Closed up in a solitary dungeon, the earl knew naught of what was occurring without, and when the Southron entered, he expected it was to lead him again to the death which had been twice averted. But the lieutenant had no sooner spoken the first word than Mar discerned it was a suppliant, not an executioner, he saw before him, and he was even promising clemency from Wallace, when Murray's trumpet sounded.

The lieutenant started. " It is too late ! We have not made the first overture, and there sounds the death bell of this garrison ! I have saved your life, earl," cried he, imploringly to

Lord Mar ; “ when Cressingham commanded me to pull the cord which would have launched you into eternity I disobeyed him ! For my sake, then, preserve this garrison and accompany me to the ramparts.”

The chains were immediately knocked off the limbs of Mar, and the lieutenant presenting him with a sword, they appeared together on the battlements. Murray did not discern that it was his uncle who mounted the walls ; but calling to him in a voice which declared there was no appeal, pointed to the humbled colours of Edward, and demanded the instant surrender of the citadel.

“ Let it be then with the pledge of Sir William Wallace’s mercy ! ” cried the venerable earl.

“ With every pledge, Lord Mar,” returned Murray, joyfully recognising his uncle, “ which you think safe to give.”

“ Then the keys of the citadel are yours,” cried the lieutenant ; “ I only ask the lives of my garrison.”

This was granted, and immediate preparations were made for the admission of the Scots. As Edwin heard the heavy chains of the portcullis drawing up, and the bolts of the huge doors grating in their guards, he thought of his mother’s liberty, of his father’s joy, in pressing her again in his arms ; and hastening to the tower where the Lord Ruthven held watch over the now sleeping De Valence, he told him all that had happened. “ Go, father,” he added, “ enter with Murray and be the first to open the prison doors of my mother.”

Lord Ruthven embraced his son. “ My dear Edwin ! this sacrifice to my feelings is worthy of you. But I have a duty to perform, superior even to the tenderest private ones. I am planted here by my commander, and shall I quit my station for any gratification until he gives leave ? No, my son ! Be you my representative to your mother ; and while my example teaches you to obey your general, those tender embraces will show her what I sacrifice to duty.”

Edwin no longer urged his father, and flew to the gate of the inner ballium. It was open, and Murray already stood on the platform before the keep, receiving the keys of the garrison.

“ Blessed sight ! ” cried the earl to his nephew. “ When I put the banner of Mar into your unpractised hand, little could I expect that, in the course of four months, I should see my brave Andrew receive the keys of proud Stirling from its commander ! ”

Murray smiled, while his plumed head bowed gracefully to his uncle, and, turning to the lieutenant, "Now," said he, "lead me to the ladies Mar and Ruthven, that I may assure them they are free."

The gates of the keep were unclosed, and the lieutenant conducted his victors along a gloomy passage to a low door studded with knobs of iron. He pushed the door slowly open, and discovered the pallid features of the Countess of Mar. The earl rushed forward, and throwing himself beside her, caught her in his arms.

"Are we then to die?" cried she, in a voice of horror. "Has Wallace abandoned us? Are we to perish? Heartless, heartless man!"

Overcome by his emotions the earl could only strain her to his breast. Edwin saw a picture of his mother's sufferings in the present distraction of the countess, and felt his powers of utterance locked up; but Lord Andrew, whose ever light heart was gay the moment he was no longer unhappy, jocosely answered, "My fair aunt, there are many hearts to die by your eyes before that day! and meanwhile I come from Sir William Wallace to set you free!"

The name of Wallace, and the intimation that *he had sent to set her free*, drove every thought of death and misery from her mind; again love seemed to breathe around her, and in a blissful trance she rather endured than participated the warm congratulations of her husband on their mutual safety.

Edwin and Murray turned to follow the lieutenant, who, preceding them, stopped at the end of the gallery. "Here," said he, "is Lady Ruthven's habitation, and, alas! not better than the countess's." While he spoke he threw open the door, and discovered its fair inmate also asleep. But when the glad voice of her son pierced her ear—when his fond embraces clung to her bosom, her surprise and emotions were almost insupportable. Hardly crediting her senses, that he whom she had believed safe in the cloisters of St. Columba could be within the dangerous walls of Stirling, that it was his mailed breast that pressed against her bosom, that it was his voice she heard exclaiming, "Mother, we come to give you freedom!"—all appeared to her like a dream of madness.

She listened, she felt him, she found her cheek wet with his rapturous tears. "Am I in my right mind?" cried she, looking at him with a fearful yet overjoyed countenance; "am I

not mad ? O ! tell me," cried she, turning to Murray and the lieutenant, " is this my son that I see, or has terror turned my brain ? "

" It is indeed your son, your Edwin, my very self," returned he, alarmed at the expression of her voice and countenance ; Murray gently advanced, and kneeling down by her, respectfully took her hand. " He speaks truth, my dear madam. It is your son, Edwin, he left his convent to be a volunteer with Sir William Wallace. He has covered himself with honour on the walls of Dumbarton ; and here also a share in his leader's victories, he is come to set you free."

At this explanation Lady Ruthven gave way to the full happiness of her soul, and falling on the neck of her son, embraced him with a flood of tears : " And thy father, Edwin, where is he ? Did not Wallace rescue him from Ayr ? "

" He did, and he is here." Edwin then repeated to his mother the affectionate message of his father, and the particulars of his release. Perceiving how happily they were engaged, Murray now, with a flutter in his own bosom, rose from his knees, and requested the lieutenant to conduct him to Lady Helen Mar.

His guide led the way by a winding staircase into a stone gallery, where letting Lord Andrew into a spacious apartment divided in the midst by a vast screen of carved cedar-wood, he pointed to a curtained entrance. " In that chamber," said he, " lodges the Lady Helen."

" Ah, my poor cousin," exclaimed Murray, " though she seems not to have tasted the hardships of her parents, she has shared their misery I do not doubt." While he spoke the lieutenant bowed in silence, and Murray entered alone. The chamber was magnificent and illumined by a lamp which hung from the ceiling. He cautiously approached the bed, fearing too hastily to disturb her, and, gently pulling aside the curtain, beheld vacancy. An exclamation of alarm had almost escaped him when, observing a half-open door at the other side of the apartment, he drew towards it, and there beheld his cousin with her back to him, kneeling before a crucifix. She spoke not, but the fervour of her action manifested how earnestly she prayed. He moved behind her, but she heard him not : her whole soul was absorbed in the success of her petition ; and at last raising her clasped hands in a paroxysm of emotion, she exclaimed,—" If that trumpet sounded the victory of the Scots,

then, Power of Goodness ! receive Thy servant's thanks. But if De Warenne have conquered, where De Valence failed ; if all whom I love be lost to me here, take me then to Thyself, and let my freed spirit fly to their embraces in heaven ! ”

“ Ay, and on earth, too, thou blessed angel ! ” cried Murray, throwing himself towards her. She started from her knees, and with such a cry as the widow of Sarcpta uttered when she embraced her son from the dead, Helen threw herself on the bosom of her cousin, and closed her eyes in a blissful swoon. The animated throbbings of Murray's breast, while he pressed her in his arms, at last aroused her to recollection. Her glistening eyes told all the happiness, all the gratitude of her soul. “ My father ?—all are safe ? ” demanded she. “ All, my best beloved ! ” answered Murray,—“ My uncle, the countess, Lord and Lady Ruthven—all are safe.”

“ And Sir William Wallace,” cried she ; “ you do not mention him. I hope no ill——”

“ He is conqueror here ! ” interrupted Murray.

Helen's heart throbbed with a new tumult as he spoke. She longed to ask whether the unknown knight from whom she had parted in the hermit's cell had ever joined Sir William Wallace ? She yearned to know that he yet lived. At the thought of the probability of his having fallen in some of these desperate conflicts her soul seemed to gasp for existence ; and dropping her head on her cousin's shoulder, “ Tell me, Andrew,” said she, and there she paused, with an emotion for which she could not account to herself.

“ Of what would my sweet cousin inquire ? ” asked Murray.

“ Did you fight alone in these battles ? ” said she, covered with blushes. “ Did no other knight but Sir William Wallace ? ”

“ Many, dearest Helen,” returned Murray, enraptured at a solicitude which he appropriated to himself. “ Many knights joined our arms. All fought in a manner worthy of their leader, and thanks to heaven none have fallen.”

“ Thanks, indeed ! ” cried Helen ; and with a hope she dared hardly whisper to herself, of seeing the unknown knight in the gallant train of the conqueror, she falteringly said, “ Now, Andrew, lead me to my father.”

Murray would perhaps have required a second bidding, had not Lord Mar, impatient to see his daughter, appeared with the countess at the door of the apartment. Hastening towards them, she fell on the bosom of her father ; and

while she bathed his face and hands with her glad tears, he, too, wept, and mingled blessings with his caresses. No coldness here met his heart ; no distracting confusion tore her from his arms ; no averted looks, by turns, alarmed and chilled the bosom of tenderness. All was innocence and duty in Helen's breast ; and every ingenuous action showed its affection and its joy. The estranged heart of Lady Mar had closed against him ; and though he suspected not its wanderings, he felt the unutterable difference between the warm transports of his daughter and the frigid gratulations forced from the lips of his wife.

Lady Mar gazed with a frown on the lovely form of Helen, as she wound her exquisitely turned arms around the earl in filial tenderness. Her bosom, heaving in the snowy whiteness of virgin purity ; her face, radiant with the softest blooms of youth ; all seemed to frame an object which malignant fiends had conjured up to blast her step-dame's hopes. " Wallace will behold these charms," cried her distracted spirit to herself, " and then, where am I ? "

While her thoughts thus followed each other, she unconsciously darted looks on Helen, which, if an evil eye had any bewitching power, would have withered all her beauties. At one of these moments Helen met her glance. She started with horror. It made her remember how she had been betrayed, and all that she had suffered from Soulis. But she could not forget that she had also been rescued ; and with that recollection the image of her preserver rose before her. At this gentle idea, her countenance took a softer expression ; and, sighing, she turned to her father's question of " How she came to be with Lady Ruthven, when he had been taught by Lord Andrew to believe her safe at St. Fillan's ? "

" Yes," cried Murray, throwing himself on a seat beside her, " I found in your letter to Sir William Wallace that you had been betrayed from your asylum by some traitor Scot, and but for my joy at our meeting, I should have inquired the name of the villain ! "

Lady Mar felt a deadly sickness at her heart on hearing that Sir William Wallace was already so far acquainted with her daughter as to have received a letter from her, and in amazed despair she prepared to listen to what she expected would bring a death-stroke to her hopes. They had met—but how ?—where ? They wrote to each other ! Then she was undone ! Helen glanced at the face of Lady Mar, and

observing its changes, regarded them as corroborations of her having been the betrayer. "If conscience disturbs you thus," thought Helen, "let it rend your heart, and perhaps remorse may follow!"

The quaking conscience of Lady Mar did indeed vary her cheeks with a thousand dyes, when, as Helen repeated part of her conversation with Macgregor's wife, Murray abruptly said, "Surely that woman could name the traitor who betrayed us into the hands of our enemies! Did she not hint it?"

Helen cast down her eyes, that even a glance might not overwhelm with shame the trembling countess. Lady Mar saw that she was acquainted with her guilt, and expecting no more mercy than she knew she would show to Helen in the like circumstances, she hastily rose from her chair, internally vowing vengeance against her triumphant daughter and hatred of all mankind. But Helen thought she might have so erred from a wife's alarm for the safety of the husband she professed to doat on; and this dutiful daughter determined never to accuse her.

Helen simply answered: "Lord Soulis would be weak as he is vile, to trust a secret of that kind with a servant"; then hurried on to the relation of her wrongs. The countess breathed again; and, almost deceiving herself with the idea that Helen was indeed ignorant of her treachery, listened with emotions of another kind when she heard of the rescue of her daughter-in-law. She saw Wallace in that brave act! But as Helen, undesignedly to herself, passed over the parts in their conversation which had most interested her, and never named the graces of his person, Lady Mar thought that to have viewed Wallace with so little notice would have been impossible, and therefore was glad of such a double conviction that he and her daughter had never met, which seemed verified when Helen said that the unknown chief had promised to join his arms with those of Wallace.

Murray had observed Helen while she spoke with an impression at his heart that made it pause. Something in this interview had whispered to him what he had never dreamt before—that she was dearer to him than fifty thousand cousins. And while the blood flushed and retreated in the complexion of Helen, and her downcast eyes refused to show what was passing there, while she hastily ran over the circumstances of her acquaintance with the stranger knight, Murray's own emotion declared the secret of hers;

and with a lip as pale as her own, he said, "But where is this brave man? He cannot have yet joined us, for surely he would have told Wallace or myself that he came from you?"

"I warned him not to do so," replied she, "for fear that your indignation against my enemies might have precipitated you into dangers to be incurred for our country only."

"Then, if he have joined us," replied Murray, rising from his seat, "you will probably soon know who he is. To-morrow morning Sir William Wallace will enter the citadel, attended by his principal knights, and in that gallant company you must doubtless discover the man who has laid such obligations on us all by your preservation."

Murray's feelings told him that glad should he be if the utterance of that obligation would repay it!

Helen herself knew not how to account for the agitation which shook her whenever she adverted to her unknown preserver. It was natural, she thought, that gratitude for a recent benefit should make her heart beat high. It was something like the enthusiasm she had felt for Wallace on the rescue of her father, and she was satisfied. But reference to the knight made her heart renew its throbbings, and painful blushes burn her cheeks. Why she should feel thus she could not account, "unless," said she to herself, "I fear that my suspicion may be guessed at, and should my words or looks betray the royal Bruce to any harm, that moment of undesigned ingratitude would be the last of my life. 'What a king will he be!' thought she; 'with what transport would the virtuous Wallace set the Scottish crown on so noble a brow.'"

Such were her meditations and feelings when she was brought a prisoner to Stirling. And when she heard of the victories of Wallace, she could not but think that her knight was there, and that he, with the renowned champion of Scotland, would fly, on the receipt of her letter, to Stirling, there to repeat the valiant deeds of Dumbarton. The first blast of the Scottish trumpet under the walls found her, as she had said, upon her knees, and kept her there, till the voice of Andrew Murray called her to freedom and to happiness.

Wallace, and perhaps her nameless hero with him, had again conquered! His idea dwelt in her heart and faltered on her tongue; and yet, in reciting her late sufferings to her father, when she came to the mentioning of the stranger's conduct to her, she felt her growing emotions as she drew near the

subject ; and, hurrying over the event, she could only excuse herself for such perturbation by supposing that the former reason of Lady Mar now excited her alarm, for fear she should fix on a new object. She hastily passed from the agitating theme to speak of De Valence, and the respect with which he had treated her during her imprisonment. His courtesy had professed to deny nothing to her wishes except her personal liberty and any conference with her parents or aunt. Her father's life, he declared, was altogether out of his power to grant. He might suspend the sentence, but he could not abrogate it.

"Yes," cried the earl, "though false and inflexible, I must not accuse him of having been so barbarous in his tyranny as Cressingham. For it was not until De Valence was taken prisoner that Joanna and I were divided. Till then we were lodged in decent apartments, but on that event Cressingham tore us from each other, and threw us into different dungeons. My sister Janet I never saw since the hour we were separated in the street of Stirling until the awful moment in which we met on the roof of this castle—the moment when I expected to behold her and my wife die before my eyes !"

Helen now learned, for the first time, the base cruelties which had been exercised on her father and his family since the capture of De Valence. She had been exempted from sharing them by the fears of Cressingham, who, knowing that the English earl had particular views with regard to her, durst not risk offending him by outraging one whom he had declared himself determined to protect.

During part of this conversation, Murray withdrew to bring Lady Ruthven and her son to share the general joy. Edwin and his mother having embraced these dear relatives, accompanied Murray to the door of the barbican which contained Lord Ruthven. They entered on the wings of conjugal and filial love ; but pensive for once, Lord Andrew, with a slow and musing step, returned into the castle to see that all was safely disposed for the remainder of the night.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

STIRLING CITADEL.

AT noon next day Murray received a message from Wallace desiring him to acquaint the Earl of Mar that he was coming to the citadel to offer the palace of Snawdown to the

ladies of Mar, and to request the earl to take charge of the illustrious prisoners he was bringing to the castle.

Each member of the family hastened to prepare for an interview which excited different expectations in each different breast. Lady Mar called forth every art of the tyring-room to embellish her still fine person. Lady Ruthven was the first who joined the earl in the great gallery. Lady Mar soon after entered, like Juno, in all her plumage of majesty and beauty.

But the trumpet of Wallace had sounded in the gates before Helen could leave her apartment. It was the herald of his approach, and she sank breathless into a seat. She was now going to see for the first time the man for whose woes she had so often wept; the man who had incurred them all for objects dear to her. He whom she had mourned as one stricken in sorrows, and feared for as an outlaw, doomed to suffering and death, was now to appear before her, arrayed as a conqueror, as the champion of Scotland, giving laws to her oppressors, and entering in triumph over fields of their slain!

Awful as this picture was to her gentle nature, it alone did not check the pulses of her heart. Was she, or was she not, to recognise in his train the young and noble Bruce? Was she to be assured that he still existed? or had perished, lonely and unknown?

While these ideas thronged her mind, the platform below was filling with the triumphant Scots; and, her door suddenly opening, Edwin entered in delighted haste:—"Come, cousin!" cried he, "Sir William Wallace has almost finished his business in the great hall. He has made my uncle governor of this place, and has committed nearly a thousand prisoners to his care. If you be not expeditious, he will enter the gallery before you," and he seized her hand, and hurried her to the gallery.

Only her aunt and step-mother were yet there. Lady Ruthven sat composedly on a tapestried bench, but Lady Mar was near the door listening impatiently to the voices beneath. At sight of Helen she drew back, but she smiled exultingly when she saw that all the splendour of beauty was flown. Her unadorned garments gave no particular attraction to the simple lines of her form: her cheek was pale, and the tremulous motion of her step deprived her of the elastic grace which was usually the charm of her nymph-like figure.

Triumph sat in the eyes of the countess; and, with an air of

authority, she waved Helen to a seat beside Lady Ruthven. The next moment the great doors opened, and a crowd of knights in armour flashed upon Helen's eyes. A strange dimness overspread her faculties, and nothing appeared to her but an indistinct throng approaching. She would have given worlds to have been removed from the spot, but was unable to stir; and on recovering her senses, she beheld Lady Mar now leaning on the bosom of one of the chiefs: his head was bent, as if speaking to her in a low voice. By the golden locks which hung down upon the jewelled tresses of the countess, and obscured his face, she judged it must indeed be the deliverer of her father, the knight of her dream. But where was he who had delivered herself from a worse fate than death? Where was the dweller of her daily thoughts, the bright apparition of her unslumbering pillow.

Helen's sight now clearing to as keen a vision as before it had been dulled and indistinct, glanced from face to face of the chieftains around; but all were strange. Then withdrawing her eyes with a sad conviction that their search was indeed in vain, in the very moment of that despair they were arrested by a glimpse of the features of Wallace. He had raised his head: he shook back his clustering hair, and her secret was revealed. In that god-like countenance she recognised the object of her devoted wishes! and with a gasp of overwhelming surprise, she must have fallen from her seat had not Lady Ruthven, hearing a sound like the sigh of death, turned round and caught her in her arms. The cry of her aunt drew every eye to the spot. Wallace immediately relinquished the countess to her husband, and moved towards the beautiful and senseless form that lay on the bosom of Lady Ruthven. The earl and his agitated wife followed.

"What ails my Helen?" asked the affectionate father.

"I know not," replied his sister; "she sat behind me, and I knew nothing of her disorder till she fell as you see."

Murray instantly supposed that she had discovered the unknown knight; and looking from countenance to countenance amongst the train, to try if he could discern the cause of such emotions, he read in no face an answering feeling with that of Helen's; and turning away from his unavailing scrutiny his eyes fixed themselves on her as if they would have read her soul. Wallace, who, in the pale form before him, saw not only the woman whom he had preserved, but the

compassionate saint who had given a hallowed grave to the remains of an angel, pure as herself, now hung over her with an anxiety so eloquent in every feature that the countess would willingly at that moment have stabbed her in every vein.

Lady Ruthven had sprinkled her niece with water ; and as she began to revive, Wallace motioned to his chieftains to withdraw. Her eyes opened slowly ; but recollection returning, she dimly perceived a press of people around her, and fearful of again encountering that face which declared the Bruce of her secret meditations and the Wallace of her declared veneration were one, she buried her blushes in the bosom of her father. In that short point of time, images of past, present, and to come rushed before her ; and without confessing to herself why she thought it necessary to make the vow, her soul seemed to swear on the sacred altar of a parent's heart never more to think on either idea, and she wished even to bury her gratitude where no eye but heaven's could see its depth and fervour.

Trembling at what might be the consequences of this scene, Lady Mar determined to hint to Wallace that Helen loved some unknown knight ; and bending to her daughter, said in a low voice, yet loud enough for him to hear, " Retire, my child ; you will be better in your own room, whether pleasure or disappointment about the person you wished to discover in Sir William's train have occasioned these emotions."

Helen recovered herself at this indelicate remark, and raising her head, with that modest dignity which only belongs to the purest mind, gently but firmly said, " I obey you, madam ; and he whom I have seen will be too generous not to pardon the effects of so unexpected a weight of gratitude." As she spoke, her turning eye met the fixed gaze of Wallace. His countenance became agitated, and dropping on his knee beside her : " Gracious lady," cried he, " mine is the weight of gratitude ; but it is dear and precious to me—a debt that my life will not be able to repay. I was ignorant of all your goodness when we parted in the hermit's cave. But the spirit of an angel like yourself, Lady Helen, will whisper to you all her widowed husband's thanks." He pressed her hand between his, and rising, left the room.

Helen looked on him with an eye in which the heroic vow of her soul spoke in every beam ; but as he arose, her spirit

seemed leaving her ; and as he disappeared from the door, her world seemed shut from her eyes.

A sacred inspiration seemed to illuminate her features, and to brace with the vigour of immortality those limbs which before had sunk under her. She forgot she was still of earth, while a holy love, like that of the dove in paradise, sat brooding on her heart.

Lady Mar gazed on her without understanding the ethereal meaning of those looks. Judging from her own impassioned feelings, she could only resolve the resplendent beauty which shone from Helen into the rapture of finding herself beloved. Had she not heard Wallace declare himself to be the unknown knight who had rescued Helen ? She had heard him devote his life to her, and was not his heart included in that dedication ? She had then heard that love vowed to another which she would have sacrificed her soul to win !

Murray, too, was confounded ; but his reflections were far different from those of Lady Mar. At the moment in which he found that he loved his cousin above all of woman's mould an unappealable voice in his bosom bade him crush every fond desire. That heart which had throbbed against his was another's ! was become the captive of Wallace's virtues ; of the only man who, his judgment would have said, deserves Helen Mar ! But when he clasped her in his arms only the night before, his enraptured soul then believed that the tender smile he saw on her lips was meant as the sweet earnest of the happier moment, when he might hold her there for ever ! That dream was now past. "Well ! be it so !" said he to himself ; "if this passion must be clipped on the wing, I have at least the consolation that it soared like the bird of Jove ! But, loveliest of created beings," thought he, looking on Helen with an expression which, had she met it, would have told her all that was passing in his soul, "if I am not to be thy love, I will be thy friend—and live for thee and Wallace !"

Believing that she had read her sentence in what she thought the triumphant glances of a happy passion, Lady Mar turned from her daughter-in-law with such a hatred kindling in her heart, she durst not trust her eyes to the inspection of the bystanders ; but her tongue could not be restrained beyond the moment in which the object of her jealousy left the room. As the door closed upon Helen, the countess turned to her lord : his eyes were looking with fondness towards the point where she

withdrew. The sight augmented the angry tumults in the breast of his wife, and with a bitter smile she said, "So, my lord, you find the icy bosom of your Helen can be thawed!"

"How do you mean, Joanna?" returned the earl, doubting her words and looks; "you surely cannot blame our daughter for being sensible of gratitude."

"I blame all young women," replied she, "who give themselves airs of unnatural coldness; and then, when the proof comes, behave in a manner so extraordinary, so indelicately, I must say."

"My Lady Mar!" ejaculated the earl, with an amazed look, "what am I to think of you from this? How has my daughter behaved indelicately? Have a care, madam, that I do not see more in this spleen than would be honourable to you for me to discover."

Fearing nothing so much as that her husband should really suspect the passion which possessed her, and so remove her from the side of Wallace, she presently recalled her former duplicity, and with a surprised and uncomprehending air replied, "I do not understand what you mean, Donald." Then turning to Lord Ruthven, who stood uneasily viewing this scene, "How," cried she, "can my lord discover spleen in my eternal anxiety respecting the daughter of the husband I love and honour above all the earth? But men do not properly estimate female reserve. Any woman would say with me that to faint at the sight of Sir William Wallace was declaring an emotion not to be revealed before so large a company! a something from which men might not draw the most agreeable inferences."

"It only declared surprise, madam," cried Murray, "the surprise of a modest and ingenuous mind that did not expect to recognise its mountain friend in the person of the protector of Scotland."

Turning to the still silent Lord Ruthven, Lady Mar again addressed him. "Step-mothers, my lord," said she, "have hard duties to perform; and when we think we fulfil them best, our suspicious husband comes with a magician's wand, and turns all our good to evil."

"Array your good in a less equivocal garb, my dear Joanna," answered the Earl of Mar, rather ashamed of the hasty words which indeed the suspicion of a moment had drawn from his lips; "judge my child by her usual conduct, not by an accidental

appearance of inconsistency, and I shall ever be grateful for your solicitude. But in this instance, though she might betray the weakness of an enfeebled constitution, it was certainly not the frailty of a love-sick heart."

"Judge me by your own rule, dear Donald," cried his wife, blandishly kissing his forehead, "and you will not again wither the mother of your boy with such a look as I just now received!"

Glad to see this reconciliation, Lord Ruthven made a sign to Murray, and they withdrew together.

Meanwhile, the honest earl, surrendering to the wiles of his wife, poured into her ear all his wishes for Helen; all the hopes to which her late meeting with Wallace, and their present recognition, had given birth. "I had rather have that man my son," said he, "than see my beloved daughter placed on an imperial throne."

"I do not doubt it," thought Lady Mar; "for there are many emperors, but only one William Wallace!" However, her sentiments she confined to herself; neither assenting nor dissenting, but answering so as to secure the confidence by which she hoped to traverse his designs.

According to the inconsistency of the wild passion that possessed her, one moment she saw nothing but despair before her, and in the next it seemed impossible that Wallace should in heart be proof against her tenderness and charms. She remembered Murray's words, that he was sent to set her free! Sir William had placed Lord Mar in a post as dangerous as honourable. Should the Southrons return in any force into Scotland, Stirling must be one of the first places they would attack. Might she not then be indeed set free? And might not Wallace, on such an event, mean to repay her for all those sighs he now sought to repress from ideas of a virtue, which she could admire, but had not courage to imitate?

These wicked meditations passed even at the side of her husband; and with a view to further every wish of her intoxicated imagination, she determined to spare no exertion to secure the support of her own family, which was the most powerful of any in the kingdom. Her father, the Earl of Strathearn, was now a misanthropic recluse in the Orkneys; she therefore did not calculate on his assistance, but she resolved on requesting Wallace to put the names of her cousins, Athol and Badenoch, into the exchange of prisoners, for by their means she expected

to accomplish all she hoped. On Mar's probable speedy death she so long thought that she regarded it as a certainty, and so pressed forward to the fulfilment of her love and ambition with as much eagerness as if he were already in his grave.

Eager to break away from Lord Mar's projects relating to his daughter, at the first decent opportunity she said : " We will consider more of this, Donald. I now resign you to the duties of your office, and shall pay mine to her whose interest is our own."

Lord Mar pressed her hand to his lips, and they parted.

Prior to Wallace's visit to the citadel, which was to be at an early hour the same morning, a list of the noble prisoners was put into his hand. Edwin pointed to the name of Lord Montgomery.

" That," said he, " is the name of a person you already esteem ; but how will you regard him when I tell you who he was ? "

Wallace turned on him an inquiring look.

" You have often spoken to me of Sir Gilbert Hambledon—"

" And this is he ! " interrupted Wallace.

Edwin recounted the manner of the earl discovering himself, and how he came to bear that title. Wallace listened in silence, and when his young friend ended, sighed heavily. " I will thank him," was all he said ; and rising, he proceeded to the chamber of Montgomery. Even at that early hour it was filled with his officers come to enquire after their late commander's health. Wallace advanced to the couch, and the Southrons drew back. The expression of his countenance told the earl that he now knew him.

" Noblest of Englishmen ! " said Wallace, in a low voice, " I come to express a gratitude to you, as lasting as the memory of the action which gave it birth. Your generous conduct to all that was dearest to me on earth was that night in the garden of Elderslie witnessed by myself. I was in the tree above your head, and nothing but a conviction that I should embarrass the honour of my wife's protector could at that moment have prevented my declaring my gratitude on the spot.

" Receive my thanks now, inadequate as they are to express what I feel. But you offered me your heart on the field of Cambus-Kenneth ; I will take that as a generous intimation how I may best acknowledge my debt. Receive, then, my never-dying friendship, my eternal gratitude," and rising

suddenly, for fear his emotions might betray themselves, he warmly pressed the hand of his English friend, and left the room.

In the course of the same day the Southron nobles were transported into the citadel, and the family of Mar removed from the fortress, to take up their residence in the palace of Snawdoun.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE CARSE OF STIRLING.

THE fame of these victories spread through the country on the wings of the wind.

Messengers were despatched by Wallace, not only to the nobles who had already declared for the cause, but to the clans who yet stood irresolute. To the chiefs who had taken the side of Edward he sent no exhortation. And when Lord Ruthven advised him to do so, "No, my lord," said he, "we must not spread a snare under our feet. If these men could be affected by the interest of their country, and as they had the power to befriend her, they would not have colleagued with her enemies. If they require arguments to bring them to their duty, should they then come to it, it would not be to fulfil but to betray. All honest minds will come to us of themselves; and those who are not so had better be avoided than shown the way by which treachery may effect what open violence cannot accomplish."

This reasoning was evident to every honest understanding, and decided the question.

Lady Mar, unknown to any one, again applied to her fatal pen; but with other views than for the ruin of the cause, or the destruction of Wallace. It was to strengthen his hands with the power of all her kinsmen; and finally, by the crown which they should place on his head, exalt her to the dignity of a queen. She wrote first to John Cummin, Earl of Buchan, enforcing reasons why he should now join the rising fortunes of his country.

"Sir William Wallace has rescued Scotland from its yoke. The country now calls for her ancient lords, those who made her kings, and supported them. Come, then, my cousin, espouse the cause of right; the cause that is in power; the cause that may aggrandise the house of Cummin with still higher dignities than any with which it has hitherto been blazoned."

With these arguments, and with others more adapted to his

Belial mind, she tried to bring him to her purpose. She despatched her letter by a messenger, whom she bribed to secrecy ; and added in her postscript, " that the answer she should hope to receive would be an offer of his services to Sir William Wallace."

While the Countess of Mar was devising her plans the despatches of Wallace had taken effect. Their simple details, and the voice of fame, had roused a general spirit throughout the land, and in the course of a very short time after the different messengers had left Stirling, all Scotland seemed pressing to throw itself at the feet of its preserver. A large body of men brought from Mar by Murray, according to his uncle's orders, were amongst the first encamped on the Carse ; and that part of Wallace's own particular band which he had left at Dumbarton to recover their wounds, now, under the command of Stephen Ireland, rejoined their lord at Stirling.

Neil Campbell, the brave lord of Loch-awe, and Lord Bothwell, the father of Lord Andrew Murray, with a strong reinforcement, arrived from Argyleshire. The chiefs of Ross, Dundas, Gordon, Lockhart, Logan, Elphinstone, Scott, Erskine, Lindsay, Cameron, and almost every noble family in Scotland, sent their sons at the head of detachments from their clans, to swell the victorious ranks of Sir William Wallace.

When this patriotic host assembled on the Carse of Stirling, every inmate of the city turned out to view the glorious sight. Mounted on a rising ground, they saw the leaders of each little army, shining in mail, and waving their gorgeous banners, which, blazoned with all the chivalry of Scotland, floated afar over the lengthened ranks.

At this moment the lines which guarded the outworks of Stirling opened from right to left and discovered Wallace advancing on a white charger. When the conqueror of Edward's host appeared a mighty shout rent the skies, and shook the earth on which they stood.

Wallace raised his helmet from his brow, as by an instinctive motion every hand bent the sword or banner it contained.

" He comes in the strength of David ! " cried the venerable Bishop of Dunkeld, who appeared at the head of his church's tenantry ; " Scots, behold the Lord's anointed ! "

The exclamation which burst like inspiration from the lips of the bishop, struck to every heart. " Long live our *William the Lion ! our Scottish King !* " was echoed with transport by

every follower on the ground ; and while the reverberating heavens seemed to ratify the voice of the people, the lords themselves joined in the glorious cry. Galloping up from the front of their ranks, they threw themselves from their steeds, and before Wallace could recover from the surprise into which this unexpected salutation had thrown him, Lord Bothwell and Lord Loch-awe, followed by the rest, had bent their knees, and acknowledged him to be their sovereign. The Bishop of Dunkeld at the same moment drawing from his breast a silver dove of sacred oil, poured it upon the unbonneted head of Wallace. " Thus, O king ! " cried he, " do I consecrate on earth what has already received the unction of heaven ! "

Wallace, at this action, was awe-struck, and raising his eyes to that heaven, his soul in silence breathed its unutterable devotion. Then looking on the bishop : " Holy father," said he, " this unction may have prepared my brows for a crown ; but it is not of this world, and Divine Mercy must bestow it. Rise, lords ! Kneel not to me, I am to you what Gideon was to the Israelites—your fellow-soldier. I cannot assume the sceptre you would bestow ; for He who rules us all has yet preserved to you a lawful monarch. Bruce lives. And were he extinct, the blood-royal flows in too many noble veins in Scotland for me to usurp its rights."

" The rights of the crown lie with the only man in Scotland who knows how to defend them ! else reason is blind, or the nation abandons its own prerogative. What we have this moment avowed is not to be forsworn. Baliol has abdicated our throne ; the Bruce deserts it : all our nobles slept till you awoke ; and shall we bow to men who may follow but will not lead ? No, bravest Wallace ; from the moment you drew the first sword for Scotland you made yourself her lawful king ! "

Wallace turned to the veteran lord of Loch-awe, who uttered this with a blunt determination that meant to say the election which had passed should not be recalled. " I made myself her champion, to fight for her freedom, not my own aggrandisement. Were I to accept the honour with which this too grateful nation would repay my service, I should not bring it that peace for which I contend. Struggling for liberty, the toils of my brave countrymen would be redoubled, for they would have to maintain the rights of an unallied king against a host of enemies. The circumstance of a man from the private stations of life being elevated to such dignity would be felt as an insult

by every royal house, and foes and friends would arm against us. On these grounds of policy alone I should repel the mischief you would bring upon yourselves by making me your king. As it is, my conscience as well as my judgment compels me to reject it. As your general, I may serve you gloriously ; as your monarch, in spite of myself, I should incur your ultimate destruction."

"From whom, noblest of Scots?" asked the lord of Bothwell.

"From yourselves, my friends," answered Wallace, with a gentle smile. "Could I take advantage of the generous enthusiasm of a grateful nation there are many who would soon revolt against their own election. You cannot be ignorant that there are natures who would endure no rule did it not come by right of inheritance ; a right by which they hold their own pre-eminence, and therefore will not dispute, lest they teach their inferiors the same refractory lesson. After having displayed their efficiency in making a king, they would prove their independence by striving to pull him down the moment he made them feel his sceptre.

"Such would be the fate at this election. Jealousies and rebellions would mark my reign, till even my closest adherents, seeing the miseries of civil war, would fall from my side, and leave the country again open to the inroads of her enemies.

"These, my friends and countrymen, would be my reasons for rejecting the crown, did my ambition point that way. But as I have no joy in titles, no pleasure in any power that does not spring hourly from the heart, let my reign be in your bosoms ; and with the appellation of your fellow-soldier, your friend ! I will fight for you, I will conquer for you—I will live or die !"

"This man," whispered Lord Buchan, "shows more cunning in repulsing a crown than most are capable of exerting to obtain one."

"Ay, but let us see," returned the Earl of March, "whether it be not Cæsar's coyness ; he thrice refused the purple, and yet he died emperor of the Romans !"

"He that offers me a crown," returned Buchan, "shall never catch me playing the coquet with its charms. I warrant you I would embrace the lovely mischief in the first presentation."

A shout rent the air. "What is that?" cried he, interrupting himself.

"He has followed your advice," answered March, with a

satirical smile ; “ it is the preliminary trumpet to long live King William the Great ! ”

Lord Buchan spurred forward to Scrymgeour, whom he knew, and inquired, “ Where the new king was to be crowned ! We have not yet to thank him for the possession of Scone ! ”

“ True,” cried Sir Alexander, comprehending the sarcasm ; “ but did Sir William Wallace accept the prayers of Scotland, neither Scone nor any other spot in the kingdom should refuse the place of his coronation.”

“ Not accept them ! ” replied Buchan ; “ then why that shout ? Do the changelings rejoice in being refused ? ”

“ When we cannot gain the altitude of our desires,” returned the knight, “ it is yet subject for thankfulness when we reach a step towards it. Sir William Wallace has consented to be considered as the protector of the kingdom ; to hold it for the rightful sovereign, under the name of regent.”

“ Ay,” cried March, “ he has only taken a mistress instead of a wife ; and, trust me, when once he has got her into his arms, it will not be all the greybeards in Scotland that can wrest her thence again. I marvel to see how men can be cajoled.”

Scrymgeour had not waited for this reply of the insolent earl, and Buchan answered him—“ I care not,” said he ; “ whoever keeps my castle over my head, and my cellars full, is welcome to reign over John of Buchan. So onward, my gallant Cospatrick, to make our bow to royalty in masquerade.”

When these scorers approached, they found Wallace standing uncovered in the midst of his nobles. With overflowing gratitude they all thronged around him ; and Wallace found a nation waiting on his nod ; the hearts of half a million of people offered to his hand, to turn and wind them as he pleased. No crown sat on his brows ; but the bright halo of true glory beamed from his god-like countenance. It even checked the arrogant smiles with which the haughty March and the voluptuous Buchan came forward to mock him with their homage.

As the near relations of Lady Mar, he received them with courtesy ; but one glance of his eye penetrated to the hollowness of both : and then, remounting his steed, the stirrups of which were held by Edwin and Ker, he touched the head of the former with his hand : “ Follow me, my friend ; I now go to pay my duty to your mother. For you, my lords,” said he, turning to the nobles around. “ I shall hope to meet you at noon in the citadel, where we must consult together on further

prompt movements. Nothing with us can be considered as won till all is gained."

The chieftains acquiesced in his mandate, and fell back towards their troops. But the foremost ranks of those brave fellows, having heard much of what had passed, were so inflamed with admiration of their regent, that they rushed forward, and collecting in crowds around his horse, and in his path, some pressed to kiss his hand, and others his garments, while the rest ran in his way, shouting and calling down blessings upon him, till he stopped at the gate of Snawdoun.

CHAPTER XXXV.

SNAWDOUN PALACE.

OWING to the multiplicity of affairs which engaged Wallace's attention after the capture of Stirling, the ladies of Mar had not seen him since his first visit to the citadel. The countess passed this time in writing her despatches to the numerous lords of her house, both in Scotland and in England; and by her subtle arguments she completely persuaded her husband of the cogency of putting the names of Lord Athol and Lord Badenoch into the list of noble prisoners he should request.

When this was proposed to Wallace, he recollected the conduct of Athol at Montrose; and, being alone with Lord Mar, he made some objections against inviting him back into the country. But the earl, who was prepared by his wife to overcome every obstacle in the way of her kinsman's return, answered, "That he believed, from the representations he had received of the private opinions both of Badenoch and Athol, that their treason was more against Baliol than the kingdom; and that now that prince was irretrievably removed, he understood they would be glad to take a part in its recovery."

"That may be the case with the Earl of Badenoch," replied Wallace, "but something less friendly to Scotland must be in the breast of the man who could betray Lord Douglas into the hands of his enemies."

"So I should have thought," replied the earl, "had not the earnestness with which my wife pleads his cause convinced me she knows more of his mind than she chooses to entrust me with, and therefore I suppose his conduct to Douglas arose from personal pique."

Though these explanations did not at all raise the absent lords in his esteem, yet to appear hostile to the return of Lady Mar's relations would be a violence to her, which Wallace was averse to committing; wishing, by showing her every proper consideration, to lead her to apprehend the turpitude of her conduct by convincing her that his abhorrence of her advances had its origin in principle, rather than from personal repugnance to herself, and so she might see the foulness of her crime, and be recalled to virtue. He was therefore not displeased to have this opportunity of obliging her; and, as he hoped that amongst so many warm friends a few cool ones could not do much injury, he gave in the names of Badenoch and Athol, with those of Lord Douglas, Sir William Maitland (the only son of the venerable knight of Thirlestane), Sir John Monteith, and many other brave Scots.

For these, the Earls de Warrenne, De Valence, and Montgomery, the Barons Hilton and Blenkinsopp, and others of note, were to be exchanged. Those of lesser consequence, man for man, were to be returned for Scots of the same degree.

In arranging preliminaries to effect the speedy return of the Scots from England; in writing despatches on this subject, and on others of equal moment, had passed the time between the surrender of Stirling and the hour when Wallace was called to the plain to receive the offered homage of his country.

Lady Mar hastened to the window of her apartment when the shouts in the streets informed her of the approach of Wallace. The loud huzzas, accompanied by the acclamations of "Our protector and prince!" seemed already to bind her brows with her anticipated diadem, and for a moment vanity lost the image of love in the purple with which she enveloped it.

Her ambitious vision was disturbed by the crowd rushing forward; the gates were thronged with people of every age and sex, and Wallace himself appeared on his white charger, with his helmet off, bowing and smiling upon the populace. She hastily snatched a chaplet of flowers from her head, and threw it from the window. Wallace looked up; his bow and his smile were then directed to her, but they were altered. The moment he met the gratulation of her eager eyes, he remembered what would have been the soft welcome of his Marion's under the like circumstance! But that tender eye was closed—that ear was shut to whom he would have wished these plaudits to have given rapture—and they were now as nothing

to him. The countess saw not what was passing in his mind, but kissing her hand to him, disappeared from the window when he entered the palace.

Another eye besides Lady Mar's had witnessed the triumphant entry of Wallace. Helen was this witness. She had passed the long interval, since she had seen Wallace, in the state of one in a dream. It appeared impossible to her that the man whom her thoughts had hitherto dwelt on as the widowed husband of Marion, as the hero whom sorrow had wholly dedicated to patriotism and to heaven, should ever awaken in her breast feelings which would seem to break like a sacrilegious host upon the holy consecration of his. Only she had contemplated his idea with the pensive impressions of one leaning over the grave of a hero, and she could then turn to the image of her unknown knight ! she could then blamelessly recollect the matchless graces of his figure ! the noble soul that breathed from his every word and action—the sweet, though thoughtful, serenity that sat on his brow ! “ There,” whispered she to herself, “ are the lofty meditations of a royal mind, devising the freedom of his people. When that is effected, how will the perfect sunshine break out from that face ! Ah ! how blest must Scotland be under his reign, when all will be light, virtue, and joy.” Bliss hovered over the image of this imaginary Bruce ; while sorrow seemed ever dropping tears, when any circumstance recalled that of the real Wallace.

Such was the state of Helen's thoughts, when in the moment of her beholding the chief of Elderslie in the citadel she recognised, in his expected melancholy form, the resplendent countenance of him whom she supposed the prince of Scotland.

At the very time that her heart told her that she irrevocably loved this too glorious Wallace, it as powerfully announced to her, that she had devoted herself to one who must ever be to her as a being of air. No word of sympathy would ever whisper felicity to her heart ; no—the flame that was within her must burn there unknown ; hidden, but not smothered.

“ Were this a canonised saint,” cried she, as she laid her throbbing head upon her pillow, “ how gladly should I feel these emotions ! For, could I not fall down and worship him ? Could I not think it a world of bliss to live for ever within the influence of his virtues ; looking at him, listening to him, rejoicing in his praises, happy in his happiness ! Yes, though I were a peasant girl, and he not know that Helen Mar even

existed ! And I may live thus," said she ; " and I may steal some portion of the rare lot that was Lady Marion's—to die for such a man ! Ah ! could I be in Edwin's place, and wait upon his smiles ! But that may not be ; I am a woman, and formed to suffer in silence and seclusion. My prayers shall follow you ; so that when we meet in heaven, the Blessed Virgin shall say with what hosts of angels her intercessions, through my vigils, have surrounded thee ! "

Thus did Helen commune with her heart ; sometimes doubting the evidence of her eyes ; then, convinced of their fidelity, striving to allay the tumults in her mind. She seldom appeared from her own rooms. And such retirement was not questioned, her father being altogether engaged at the citadel, the countess absorbed in her own speculations, and Lady Ruthven alone interrupted the solitude of her niece by frequent visits. Little suspecting the cause of Helen's prolonged indisposition, she generally selected Wallace for the subject of conversation. She descanted with enthusiasm on the rare perfection of his character, told her all that Edwin had related of his actions from the taking of Dumbarton to the present moment, and then bade Helen remark the miracle of such wisdom, valour, and goodness being found in one so young and handsome.

" So, my child," added she, " depend on it, before he was Lady Marion's husband he must have heard sighs enough from the fairest in our land to have turned the wits of half the male world. But, alas ! " and then the playful expression of her countenance altered, " he is now for none on earth ! "

With these words she turned the subject to the confidential hours he passed with the young adopted brother of his heart. Every fond emotion seemed then centred in his wife and child. When Lady Ruthven repeated his pathetic words to Edwin, she sobbed, and paused to recover ; while deep and silent tears flowed from the heart to the eyes of Lady Helen. " Alas ! " cried Lady Ruthven, " that a man, so formed to grace every relation in life, should be deprived of the wife on whom he doted ; that he should be cut off from all hope of posterity ; that, when he shall die, nothing will be left of William Wallace—breaks my heart ! "

" Ah, my aunt," cried Helen, raising her head with animation, " will he not leave behind him the liberty of Scotland ? That is an offspring worthy of his god-like soul. "

" True, my dear Helen ; but had you ever been a parent you

would know that no achievements, however great, can heal the wound made in a father's heart by the loss of a beloved child. And though Sir William Wallace never saw the infant ready to bless his arms, yet it perished in the bosom of its mother ; and that circumstance must redouble his affliction ; horribly does it enhance the cruelty of the deed ! ”

“ He has in all things been a direful sacrifice,” returned Helen ; “ and with God alone dwells the power to wipe the tears from his heart.”

“ They flow not from his eyes,” answered her aunt ; “ but deep, deep is the grief that, my Edwin says, is settled there.”

While Lady Ruthven was uttering these words, shouts in the streets made her pause ; and soon recognising the name of Wallace sounding from the lips of the rejoicing multitude, she turned to Helen ; “ Here comes our deliverer ! ” cried she, taking her by the hand ; “ we have not seen him since the first day of our liberty. It will do you good, as it will me, to look on his face ! ”

She obeyed the impulse of her aunt's arm, and reached the window just as he passed into the court-yard. Helen's soul seemed rushing from her eyes. “ Ah ! it is indeed he ! ” thought she ; “ no dream, no illusion, but his very self.”

He looked up to the window of Lady Mar, and as he bowed he smiled. All the charms of that smile struck upon the soul of Helen ; and, hastily retreating, she sunk into her seat.

“ O, no ! that man cannot be born for the isolated state I have just lamented. He is not to be for ever cut off from communicating that happiness to which he would give so much enchantment ! ” Lady Ruthven ejaculated this with fervour, her cheeks flushing with a sudden and more forcible admiration of the person and mien of Wallace. “ There was something in that smile, Helen, which tells me all is not chilled within. And, indeed, how should it be otherwise ! That generous interest in the happiness of all, which seems to flow in a tide of universal love, cannot spring from a source incapable of dispensing the softer streams of it again.”

Helen, whose well-poised soul was not affected by the agitations of her body, calmly answered : “ Such a hope little agrees with all you have been telling me of his conversations with Edwin. Sir William Wallace will never love woman more ; and even to name the idea seems an offence against the sacredness of his sorrow.”

“ Blame me not, Helen,” returned Lady Ruthven, “ that I

forgot probability in grasping at a possibility that might give me such a nephew as Sir William Wallace, and you a husband worthy of your merits ! I had always, in my own mind, fixed on the unknown knight for your future lord ; and now that I find he and the deliverer of Scotland are one, I am not to be looked grave at for wishing to reward him with the most precious heart that ever beat in a female breast."

"No more of this, if you love me, my dear aunt !" returned Helen ; "it neither can or ought to be. I revere the memory of Lady Marion too much not to be agitated by the subject ; so no more !" --she was agitated. But at that instant Edwin, throwing open the door, put an end to the conversation.

He came to apprise his mother that Sir William Wallace was in the state apartments come purposely to pay his respects to her, not having been introduced to her when the sudden illness of her niece in the castle had made them part so abruptly.

"I will not interrupt his introduction now," said Helen, with a faint smile ; "a few days' retirement will strengthen me, and then I shall see our protector as I ought."

"I will stay with you," cried Edwin, "and I daresay Sir William Wallace will have no objection to be speedily joined by my mother ; for, as I came along, I met my aunt Mar hastening through the gallery ; and, between ourselves, my sweet coz, I do not think my noble friend quite likes a private conference with your fair step-mother."

Lady Ruthven had withdrawn before he made this observation. "Why, Edwin ?—surely she would not do anything ungracious to one whom she owes so great a weight of obligations ?" When Helen asked this, she remembered the spleen Lady Mar once cherished against Wallace, and she feared it might now have revived.

"Ungracious ! O, no ! the reverse of that ; but her gratitude is full of absurdity. I will not repeat the fooleries with which she sought to detain him at Bute. And that some new fancy respecting him is now about to menace his patience I am convinced ; for, in my way hither, I met her hurrying along, and as she passed me, she exclaimed, 'Is Lord Buchan arrived ?' I answered, 'Yes.' 'Ah, then he proclaimed him king !' cried she : and into the great gallery she darted."

"You do not mean to say," demanded Helen, turning her eyes with an expression which seemed confident of his answer, "that Sir William Wallace has accepted the crown of Scotland ?"

"Certainly not," replied Edwin; "but as certainly it has been offered to him, and he has refused it."

"I could have sworn it!" returned Helen, rising from her chair, "all is loyal, all is great and consistent there, Edwin!"

"He is indeed the perfect exemplar of all nobleness," rejoined the youth; "and I believe I shall even love you better, my dear cousin, because you seem to have so clear an apprehension of his real character." He then proceeded, with all the animation of the most zealous affection, to narrate to Helen the particulars of the late scene on the Carse of Stirling. And while he deepened still more the profound impression the virtues of Wallace had made on her heart, he re-opened its more tender sympathies by repeating, with even minuter accuracy than he had done to his mother, details of those hours which he had passed with him in retirement. He spoke of the beacon-hill; of moonlight walks in the camp, when all but the sentinels, and his general and himself, were sunk in sleep.

These were the seasons when the suppressed feelings of Wallace would by fits break from his lips, and at last pour themselves out, unrestrainedly, to the ear of sympathy. As the young narrator described all the endearing qualities of his friend, the cheerful heroism with which he quelled every tender remembrance to do his duty in the day, "for it is only in the night," said Edwin, "that my general remembers Elderslie." Helen's tears again stole silently down her cheeks. Edwin perceived them, and throwing his arms gently around her, "Weep not, my sweet cousin," said he; "for, with all his sorrow, I never saw true happiness till I beheld it in the eyes of Sir William Wallace. He has talked to me of the joy he should experience in giving liberty to Scotland, and establishing her peace, till his enthusiastic soul has looked on me with a consciousness of enjoyment, which seemed to say that all bliss was summed up in a patriot's breast.

"And at other times, when, after a conversation on his beloved Marion, a few natural regrets would pass his lips, then he would show me the world beyond this, which is the aim of all his deeds, the end of all his travails; and, lost in the rapturous idea of meeting his Marion there, a foretaste of all would seem to seize his soul; and were I then called upon to point out the most enviable felicity on earth, I should say it is that of Sir William Wallace. It is this enthusiasm in all he believes and feels that makes him what he is. It is this eternal spirit of hope that

makes him rise from sorrow, like the sun from a cloud, brighter, and with more ardent beams. It is this that bathes his lips in the smiles of paradise, that throws a divine lustre over his eyes, and makes all dream of love and happiness that look upon him."

Edwin paused. "Is it not so, my cousin?"

Helen raised her thoughtful face. "He is not a being of this earth, Edwin. We must learn to imitate him, as well as to—" She hesitated, and then added, "as well as to revere him. I do revere him with such a sentiment as fills my heart when I bend before the altars of the saints. But not to worship," said she, interrupting herself—"that would be a crime. To look on him as a glorious example of patient suffering—of invincible courage in the behalf of truth and mercy! This is the end of my reverence of him; and this sentiment, my dear Edwin, you partake."

"It possesses me wholly," cried the youth; "I have no thought, no wish, nor ever move or speak, but with the intent to be like him. He calls me his brother! and I will be so in soul, though I cannot in blood; and then, my dear Helen, you shall have two Sir William Wallaces to love."

"Sweetest, sweetest boy!" cried Helen, putting her lips to his forehead; "you will then always remember that Helen so dearly loves Scotland as to be jealous, above all earthly things, for the lord regent's safety. Be his guardian angel. Beware of treason in man and woman, friend and kindred. It lurks, my cousin, under the most specious forms; and, as one, mark Lord Buchan: in short, have a care of all whom any of the house of Cummin may introduce. Watch over your general's life in the private hour. It is not the public field I fear for him; his valiant arm will there be his own guard! But, in the unreserved day of confidence, envy will point its dagger; and then be as eyes to his too trusting soul—as a shield to his too confidently exposed breast!"

"I will be all this," cried Edwin, who saw nothing in her tender solicitude but the ingenuous affection which glowed in his own heart; "and I will be your eyes, too, my cousin; for when I am absent with Sir William Wallace I shall consider myself your representative, and so will send you regular despatches of all that happens to him."

Thanks would have been a poor means of imparting what she felt at this assurance; and, rising from her seat, she pressed Edwin's hand to her heart; then bowing her head to him in token of gratitude, withdrew into an inner apartment.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

STIRLING CASTLE AND COUNCIL HALL.

THE countess's tribute from the window gave Wallace reason to anticipate her company in his visit to Lady Ruthven ; and finding the room vacant, he despatched Edwin for his mother, that he might not be distressed by the unchecked advances of a woman whom, as the wife of Lord Mar, he was obliged to see, and whose weakness he pitied. Respect the countess he could not. For, as she acted against every moral law—against his declared sentiments, it was evident that she placed little value on his esteem ; and therefore he despised, while he pitied, a human creature ungovernably yielding herself to the sway of her passions.

In the midst of thoughts so little to her advantage, Lady Mar entered the room. Wallace turned to meet her, while she, hastening towards him, and dropping on one knee, exclaimed, " Let me be the first woman in Scotland to acknowledge its king ! "

Wallace put forth both his hands to raise her, and smiling, replied, " Lady Mar, you would do me an honour I can never claim."

" How ? " cried she, starting up. " What, then, was that cry I heard ? Did they not call you ' prince,' and ' sovereign ' ? Did not my Lord Buchan——"

Confused, disappointed, overpowered, she left the sentence unfinished, sank on a seat, and burst into tears. At that moment she saw her anticipated crown fall from her head, and having united the gaining of Wallace with his acquisition of this dignity, all her hopes seemed again the sport of winds. She felt as if Wallace had eluded her power, for it was by the ambition-serving acts of her kinsman that she had meant to bind him to her love ; and now all was rejected, and she wept in despair. He gazed at her with amazement. What these emotions and his elevation had to do with each other he could not guess ; but, recollecting her manner of mentioning Lord Buchan's name, he answered, " Lord Buchan I have just seen. He and Lord March came upon the Carse at the time I went thither, and these two noblemen, though so lately the friends of Edward, united with the rest in proclaiming me regent."

This word dried the tears of Lady Mar. She saw the shadow of royalty behind it, and summoning artifice, to conceal the joy

of her heart, she calmly said, "Do not too severely condemn this weakness; it is not that of vain wishes for your aggrandisement. You are the same to Joanna Mar, whether as a monarch or a private man, so long as you possess that supremacy in all excellence which first gained her esteem. It is for Scotland's sake alone that I wish you to be her king. You have taught me to forget all selfish desires—to respect myself," cried she; "and from this hour, I conjure you to wipe from your memory all my folly—all my love——"

With the last word her bosom heaved tumultuously, and she rose in agitation. Wallace now gazed on her with redoubled wonder. She saw it; and hearing a foot in the passage, turned, and grasping his hand, said, in a soft and hurried tone, "Forgive, that what is entwined with my heart should cost me some pangs to wrest thence again! Only respect me and I am comforted." Wallace in silence pressed her hand and the door opened.

Lady Ruthven entered. The countess, whose present aim was to throw the virtue of Wallace off its guard, and to take that by sap which she found resisted open attack, with a penitential air disappeared by another passage. Edwin's gentle mother was followed by the same youth who had brought Helen's packet to Berwick. It was Walter Hay, anxious to be recognised by his benefactor, to whom his recovered health had rendered his person strange. Wallace received him with kindness, and told him to bear his grateful respects to his lady for her care of her charge. Lord Ruthven with others soon entered, and at the appointed hour they attended their chief to the citadel.

The council hall was already filled with the lords who had brought their clans to the Scottish standard. On the entrance of Wallace they rose; and Mar coming forward, followed by the heralds and other officers of ceremony, saluted him with the due forms of regent, and led him to the throne. Wallace ascended, but it was only to take thence a packet which had been deposited for him on his cushion, and coming down again, he laid the parchment on the council table.

"I can do all things best," said he, "when I am upon a level with my friends." He then broke the seal of the packet. It was from the Prince of Wales, agreeing to Wallace's proposed exchange of prisoners, but denouncing him as the instigator of the rebellion, and threatening him with a future judg-

ment from his incensed king for the mischief he had wrought in the realm of Scotland. The letter finished with a demand that the town and citadel of Berwick should be surrendered to England as a gage for the quiet of the borders till Edward should return.

Kirkpatrick scoffed at the audacious menace of the young prince. "He should come amongst us like a man," cried he, "and we would soon show him who it is that works mischief in Scotland! Ay, even on his back, we would write the chastisement due to the offender."

"Be not angry with him, my friend," returned Wallace; "these threats are words of course from the son of Edward. Did he not fear both our rights and our arms, he would not so readily accord with our propositions. You see every Scottish prisoner is to be on the borders by a certain day; and to satisfy that impatient valour I intend to make your prowess once again the theme of their discourse. You will retake your castles in Annandale!"

"Give me but the means to recover those stout gates of our country," cried Kirkpatrick, "and I will warrant you to keep the keys in my hand till doomsday."

Wallace resumed: "Three thousand men are at your command. When the prisoners pass each other on the Cheviots the armistice will terminate. You may then fall back upon Annandale, and that night light your own fires in Torthorald. Send the expelled garrisons into Northumberland, and show this haughty prince that we know how to replenish his depopulated towns!"

"But first I will set my mark on them!" cried Kirkpatrick, with one of those laughs which ever preluded some savage proposal.

"I can guess it would be no gentle one," returned Wallace. "Why will you ever sully the fair field of your fame with an ensanguined tide?"

"It is the fashion of the times," replied Kirkpatrick roughly. "You only, who, perhaps, had most cause to go with the stream, have chosen a path of your own. But look around! see our burns, which the Southrons made run with Scottish blood; our hillocks, swollen with the cairns of our slain; the highways blocked up with graves of the murdered; our lands filled with maimed clansmen, who purchased life of our ruthless tyrants, by the loss of eyes and limbs! And, shall we talk

of gentle methods with the perpetrators of these horrors ? Sir William Wallace, you would make women of us."

"Shame, shame, Kirkpatrick !" resounded from every voice ; "you insult the regent !"

Kirkpatrick stood proudly frowning with his left hand on the hilt of his sword. Wallace, by a motion, hushed the tumult, and spoke :—"No true chief of Scotland can offer me greater respect than frankly to trust me with his sentiments."

"Though we disagree in some points," cried Kirkpatrick, "I am ready to die for him at any time, for I believe a trustier Scot treads not the earth ; but I repeat, why, by this mincing mercy, seek to turn our soldiers into women ?"

"I seek to make them men," replied Wallace ; "to be aware that they fight with fellow-creatures, with whom they may one day be friends, and not, like the furious savages of old Scandinavia, drink the blood of eternal enmity. I would neither have my chieftains set examples of cruelty, nor degrade themselves by imitating the barbarities of our enemies. That Scotland bleeds at every pore is true, but let peace be our aim, and we shall heal all her wounds."

"Then I am not to cut off the ears of the freebooters in Annandale ?" cried Kirkpatrick, with a good-humoured smile : "Have it as you will, only you must new christen me to wash the war-stain from my hand. The rite of my infancy was performed as became a soldier's son ; my font was my father's helmet, and the first pap I sucked lay on the point of his sword."

"You have not shamed your nurse !" cried Murray.

"Nor will I," answered Kirkpatrick, "while the arm that slew Cressingham remains unwithered."

While he spoke, Ker entered to ask permission to introduce a messenger from Earl de Warenne. Wallace gave consent. It was Sir Hugh le de Spencer, a near kinsman of the Earl of Hereford, the tumultuary constable of England. He was the envoy who had brought the Prince of Wales's despatches to Stirling. Wallace was standing when he entered, and so were the chieftains, but at his appearance they sat down. Wallace retained his position.

"I come," cried the Southron knight, "from the Lord Warden of Scotland, who, like my prince, too greatly condescends to do otherwise than command, where he now treats ; I come to the leader of this rebellion, William Wallace, to

receive an answer to the terms granted by the clemency of my master, the son of his liege lord, to this misled kingdom."

"Sir Knight," replied Sir William Wallace, "when the Southron lords delegate a messenger to me who knows how to respect the representative of the nation to which he is sent, and the agents of his own country, I shall give them my reply. You may withdraw."

The Southron stood, resolute to remain where he was: "Do you know, proud Scot," cried he, "to whom you dare address this imperious language? I am the nephew of the lord high constable of England."

"It is pity," cried Murray, looking coolly up from the table, "that he is not here to take his kinsman into custody!"

Le Spencer fiercely half drew his sword: "Sir, this insult——"

"Must be put up with," cried Wallace, interrupting him, and motioning Edwin to lay his hand on the sword; "you have insulted the nation to which you were sent on a peaceful errand, and having invited the resentment of every chief here present, you cannot justly complain against their indignation. But in consideration of your youth, and probable ignorance of what becomes the character of an ambassador, I grant you the protection your behaviour has forfeited. Sir Alexander Scrymgeour," said he, turning to him, "you will guard Sir Hugh le de Spencer to the Earl de Warrenne, and tell that nobleman I am ready to answer any proper messenger."

The young Southron, frowning, followed Scrymgeour from the hall, and Wallace, turning to Murray, "My friend," said he, "it is not well to stimulate insolence by repartee. This young man's speech, though an insult to the nation, was directed to me, and by me only it ought to have been answered, and that seriously. The haughty spirit of this man should have been quelled, not incensed; and, had you proceeded one word further, you would have given him an apparently just cause of complaint against you, and of that, my friend, I am most sensibly jealous. It is not policy nor virtue to be rigorous to the extent of justice."

"I know," returned Murray, "that my wits are too many for me. But pardon me now, and I promise to rein them close when next I see this prancing knight."

"Bravo, my Lord Andrew!" cried Kirkpatrick, in an affected whisper, "I am not always to be bird alone under the

whip of our regent ; “ you have had a few stripes, and now look a little of my feather ! ”

“ Like as a swan to a vulture, good Roger,” answered Murray.

Wallace attended not to this tilting of humour between the chieftains, but engaged himself in close discourse with the elder nobles at the higher end of the hall. In half an hour Scrymgeour returned and with him Baron Hilton. He brought an apology from De Warenne for the behaviour of his ambassador, and added his persuasions to the demands of England, that the regent would surrender Berwick not only as a pledge for the Scots keeping the truce on the borders, but as a proof of his confidence in Prince Edward.

Wallace answered that he had no reason to show extraordinary confidence in one who manifested, by such a requisition, that he had no faith in Scotland ; and therefore, neither as a proof of confidence, nor as a gage of her word, should Scotland, a victorious power, surrender the eastern door of her kingdom to the vanquished. Wallace declared himself ready to dismiss the English prisoners to the frontiers, and to maintain the armistice till they had reached the south side of the Cheviots. “ But,” added he, “ my word must be my bond, for by the honour of Scotland I will give no other.”

“ Then,” answered Baron Hilton, with an honest flush passing over his cheek, as if ashamed of what he had next to say, “ I am constrained to lay before you the last instructions of the Prince of Wales to Earl de Warenne.”

He took a royally sealed roll of vellum from his breast, and read aloud—

“ Thus saith Edward, Prince of Wales, to Earl de Warenne, lord warden of Scotland. If that arch-rebel, William Wallace, who now assumeth to himself the rule of all our royal father’s hereditary dominions north of the Cheviots, refuseth to give unto us the whole possession of the town and citadel of Berwick-upon-Tweed, as a pledge of his faith, to keep the armistice on the borders from sea to sea : we command you to tell him, that we shall detain under the ward of our good lieutenant of the Tower in London, the person of William the Lord Douglas, as a close captive, until our prisoners, now in Scotland, arrive safely at Newcastle-on-Tyne. This mark of supremacy over a rebellious people we owe as a pledge of their homage to our royal

father, and as a tribute of our gratitude to him for having allowed us to treat at all with so undutiful a part of his dominions.
(Signed) EDWARD, P.W."

"Baron," cried Wallace, "it would be beneath the dignity of Scotland to retaliate this act with the like conduct. The exchange of prisoners shall yet be made, and the armistice held sacred on the borders. But, as I hold the door of war open in the interior of the country, before the Earl de Warenne leaves this citadel (and it shall be on the day assigned), please the Almighty Lord of Justice, the Southron usurpers of all our castles on the eastern coast shall be our hostages for the safety of Lord Douglas!"

"And this is my answer, noble Wallace?"

"It is: and you see no more of me till that which I have said is done."

Baron Hilton withdrew; and Wallace, turning to his peers, rapidly made dispositions for a sweeping march from frith to frith; and having sent those who were to accompany him to prepare for departure next day at dawn, he retired with the lords Mar and Bothwell to arrange affairs relative to the prisoners.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE GOVERNOR'S APARTMENTS.

THE sun rose on Wallace and his legions as they traversed the once romantic glades of Strathmore; but now the scene was changed. The villages were abandoned, and the land lay around in uncultivated wastes. Sheep, without a shepherd, fled wild from the approach of man; and wolves issued howling from the cloisters of depopulated monasteries. The army approached Dunblane, but it was without inhabitant; grass grew in the streets; and the birds which roosted in the desert dwellings flew scared from the windows as the trumpet of Wallace sounded through the town. Loud echoes repeated the summons from its hollow walls; but no other voice was heard, no human face appeared, for the ravening hand of Cressingham had been there!

They proceeded over many a hill and plain, and found that the same withering touch of desolation had burnt up and overwhelmed the country. Wallace saw that his troops were faint

for want of food ; cheering them, he promised that Ormsby should provide them a feast in Perth ; and, with re-awakened spirits, they took the river Tay at its fords, and were soon before the walls of that well-armed city. But it was governed by a coward, and Ormsby fled to Dundee at the first sight of the Scottish army. His flight might have warranted the garrison to surrender without a blow ; but a braver man being his lieutenant, sharp was the conflict before Wallace could compel that officer to abandon the ramparts, and to sue for the very terms he had at first rejected.

After the fall of Perth, the young regent made a rapid progress through that part of the country ; driving the Southron garrisons out of Scone, and all the embattled towns ; expelling them from the castles of Kincairn, Elcho, Kinfauns, and Doune ; and then proceeding to the marine fortresses, he compelled Dundee, Coupar, Glamis, Montrose, and Aberdeen, all to acknowledge the power of his arms. He seized most of the English ships in those ports ; and manning them with Scots, soon cleared the seas of the vessels which had escaped, taking some, and putting others to flight ; and in one of the latter was the fugitive Ormsby.

This enterprise achieved, Wallace, with a host of prisoners, turned his steps towards the Forth ; but ere he left the banks of the Tay and Dee, he detached three thousand men, under the command of Lord Ruthven, giving him a commission to range the country from the Carse of Gowrie to remotest Sutherland ; and in all that tract reduce every town and castle which had admitted a Southron garrison. Wallace took leave of Lord Ruthven at Huntingtower ; and that worthy nobleman, when he assumed, with the government of Perth, this extensive command, said, as he grasped the regent's hand, " I say not, what is my gratitude for thus making me an arm of my country, but deeds will show ! "

A rapid march round by Fifeshire brought the conqueror again within sight of the towers of Stirling. It was on the eve of the day which he had promised Earl de Warrene should see the English prisoners depart for the borders. No doubt of his arriving at the appointed time was entertained by the Scots or by the Southrons in the castle ; the one knew the sacredness of his word, and the other, having felt his prowess, would not suppose that any could withstand him by whom they were beaten.

De Warenne, as he stood on the battlements of the keep, beheld from afar the long line of Scottish soldiers as they descended the Ochil hills. When he pointed it out to De Valence, that nobleman contradicted the observation of the veteran earl.

"Your sight deceives you," said he, "it is only the sunbeams playing on the cliffs."

"Then those cliffs are moving ones," cried De Warenne, "which, I fear, have ground our countrymen on the coast to powder! We shall find Wallace here before sunset to show us how he has resented the affront our ill-advised prince cast on his jealous honour."

"His honour," returned De Valence, "is like that of his countrymen's—an enemy alike to his own interest, and to that of others. Had it allowed him to accept the crown of Scotland, and so have fought Edward with the concentrating arm of a king, or would he even now offer peace to our sovereign, granting his prerogative as liege lord of the country, all might go well; but as the honour you speak of prevents his using these means of ending the contest, destruction must close his career."

"And what quarrel," demanded De Warenne, "can you, my Lord de Valence, have against this nice honour of Sir William Wallace, since you allow it secures the final success of our cause?"

"His honour and himself are hateful to me!" impatiently answered De Valence; "he crosses me in my wishes, public and private; and for the sake of my king and myself, I might almost be tempted——" He turned pale as he spoke, and paused.

"Tempted to what?" asked De Warenne.

"To a Brutus mode of ridding the state of an enemy."

"That might be noble in a Roman citizen," returned De Warenne, "which would be villainous in an English lord, treated as you have been by a generous victor, not the usurper of any country's liberties, but rather a Brutus in defence of his own. Which man of us all, from the general to the meanest follower in our camps, has he injured?"

Lord Aymer frowned. "Did he not expose me, threaten me with an ignominious death on the walls of Stirling?"

"But was it before he saw the Earl of Mar, with his hapless family, brought, with halters on their necks, to be suspended from this very tower? What he then did was to check Cressingham from imbruing his hands in the blood of female and infant innocence."

"I care not," cried De Valence, "what are or are not the offences of this domineering Wallace, but I hate him; and my respect for his advocates cannot but correspond with that feeling." As he spoke, he abruptly turned away, and left the battlements.

Pride would not allow the enraged earl to confess his private reasons for this vehement enmity against the Scottish chief. A conference which he had held the preceding evening with Lord Mar, was the cause of this augmented hatred; and from that moment the haughty Southron vowed the destruction of Wallace, by open attack or secret treachery. Ambition, and the base counterfeit of love, those two master passions in untempered minds, were the springs of this antipathy. The instant he knew that the young creature whom, at a distance, he discerned clinging around the Earl of Mar's neck in the streets of Stirling, was the same Lady Helen on whose account Lord Soulis had poured on him such undeserved invectives in Bothwell Castle—curious to have a nearer view of one whose transcendent beauty he had often heard celebrated by others, he ordered her to be immediately conveyed to his apartments in the citadel.

On their first interview he was more struck by her personal charms than he had ever been with any woman's, although few were so noted for gallantry in the English court as himself. He could hardly understand the nature of his feelings while discoursing with her. To all others of her sex he had declared his enamoured wishes with as much ease as vivacity; but when he looked on Helen, the admiration her loveliness inspired was checked by awe. No word of passion escaped his lips; he sought to win her by a deportment consonant with her own dignity of manners, and obeyed all her wishes excepting when they pointed to any communication with her parents. He feared the wary eyes of the Earl of Mar. But nothing of this reverence of Helen was grounded on any principle within the heart of De Valence. His idea of virtue was so erroneous that he believed by the short assumption of its semblance, he might so steal on the confidence of his victim as to induce her to forget all the world, nay, heaven itself, in his sophistry and blaudishments. To facilitate this end, he at first designed to precipitate the condemnation of the earl, that he might be rid of a father's existence, holding, in dread of his censure, the perhaps otherwise yielding heart of his lovely intended mistress.

The unprincipled and impure can have no idea that virtue or delicacy are other than vestments of disguise or of ornaments, to be thrown off at will ; and, therefore, to reason with such minds is to talk to the winds—to tell a man who is born blind to decide between two colours. De Valence, therefore, seeing the anguish of her fears for her father, and hearing the fervour with which she implored for his life, adopted the plan of granting the earl reprieves from day to day, and, in spite of the remonstrances of Cressingham, he intended (after having worked upon the terrors of Helen) to grant to her her father's release on condition of her yielding herself to be his. He had even meditated that the accomplishment of this device should have taken place the very night in which Wallace's first appearance before Stirling had called its garrison to arms.

Impelled by vengeance against the man who had driven him from Dumbarton and from Ayr, and irritated at being delayed in the moment when his passion was to seize its object, De Valence thought to end all by a *coup de main*, and rushing out of the gates, was taken prisoner. Such was the situation of things when Wallace first became master of the place.

Now when the whole of the English army were in the same captivity with himself, when he saw the lately proscribed Lord Mar governor of Stirling, and that the Scottish cause seemed triumphant on every side, De Valence changed his former illicit views on Helen, and bethought him of making her his wife. Ambition, as well as love, impelled him to this resolution, for he aspired to the dignity of lord warden of Scotland ; and he foresaw that the vast influence which his marriage with the daughter of Mar must give him in the country would be a decisive argument with the king of England.

To this purpose, not doubting the Scottish earl's acceptance of such a son-in-law, on the very day that Wallace marched towards the coast, De Valence sent to request an hour's private audience of Lord Mar. He could not then grant it ; but at noon, next day, they met in the governor's apartments.

The Southron, without much preface, opened his wishes, and proffered his hand for the Lady Helen. " I will make her the proudest lady in England," continued he ; " for she shall have a court in my Welsh province little inferior to that of Edward's queen."

" Pomp would have no sway with my daughter," replied the earl ; " it is the princely mind she values, not its pageantry.

Whomsoever she prefers, the tribute will be paid to the merit of the object, not to his rank, and therefore, earl, should it be you, the greater will be your pledge of happiness. I shall repeat to her what you have said, and to-morrow deliver her answer."

Not deeming it possible that it should be otherwise than favourable, De Valence allowed his imagination to roam over every anticipated delight. He exulted in the pride with which he would show this perfection of northern beauty to the fair of England: how would her simple graces put to shame the laboured beauties of the court! And then it was not only the artless charms of a wood-nymph he should present to the wondering throng, but a being whose majesty of soul proclaimed her high descent and peerless virtues. How did he congratulate himself, in contemplating this unsullied temple of virgin innocence, that he had never, even by one impassioned sigh, contaminated her pure ear, or broke the magic spell which seemed fated to crown him with happiness unknown, with honour unexampled! To be so blessed, so distinguished, so envied, was to him a dream of triumph, that wafted away all remembrance of his late defeat; and he believed in taking Helen from Scotland, he should bear away a richer prize than any he could leave behind.

Full of these anticipations, he attended the governor of Stirling the next day to hear his daughter's answer. But unwilling to give the earl that advantage over him, which a knowledge of his views in the marriage might occasion, he affected a composure he did not feel, and with a lofty air entered the room as if he were come rather to confer than to beg a favour. This deportment did not lessen the satisfaction with which the brave Scot opened his mission.

"My lord, I have seen my daughter. She duly appreciates the honour you would confer on her: she is grateful for all your courtesies whilst she was your prisoner, but beyond that sentiment, her heart, attached to her native land, cannot sympathise with your wishes."

De Valence started. He did not expect anything in the shape of a denial; but supposing that perhaps a little of his own art was tried by the father to enhance the value of his daughter's yielding, he threw himself into a chair, and affecting chagrin at a disappointment (which he did not believe was seriously intended), exclaimed with vehemence, "Surely, Lord Mar, this is not meant as a refusal? I cannot receive it

as such, for I know Lady Helen's gentleness, I know the sweet tenderness of her nature would plead for me were she to see me at her feet, and hear me pour forth the most ardent passion that ever burnt in a human breast. Oh, my gracious lord ! if it be her attachment to Scotland which alone militates against me, I will promise that her time shall be passed between the two countries. Her marriage with me may facilitate that peace with England which must be the wish of us all ; and perhaps the lord wardenship which De Warenne now holds may be transferred to me. I have reasons for expecting that it will be so ; and then she, as a queen in Scotland, and you as her father, may claim every distinction from her fond husband, every indulgence for the Scots, which your patriot heart can dictate. This would be a certain benefit to Scotland, while the *ignus fatuus* you are now following, however brilliant may be its career during Edward's absence, must on his return be extinguished in disaster and infamy."

The silence of the Earl of Mar, who, willing to hear all that was in the mind of De Valence, had let him proceed uninterrupted, encouraged the Southron lord to say more than he had at first intended to reveal ; but when he made a pause, and seemed to expect an answer, the earl spoke—

" I am fully sensible of the honour you would bestow upon my daughter and myself by your alliance ; but, as I have said before, her heart is too devoted to Scotland to marry any man whose birth does not make it his duty to prefer the liberty of her native land even before his love for her. That hope to see our country freed from a yoke unjustly laid upon her, that hope which you, not considering our rights, or weighing the power that lies in a just cause, denominate an *ignus fatuus*, is the only passion, I believe, that lives in the gentle bosom of my Helen ; and therefore, noble earl, not even your offers can equal the measure of her wishes."

At this speech De Valence bit his lip with real disappointment ; " I am not to be deceived, Lord Mar," cried he ; " I am not to be cajoled by the pretended patriotism of your daughter ; I know the sex too well to be cheated with these excuses. The *ignus fatuus* that leads your daughter from my arms is not the freedom of Scotland, but the handsome rebel who conquers in its name ! He is now fortune's minion, but he will fall, Lord Mar, and then what will be the fate of his mad adherents ? "

“Earl de Valence,” replied the veteran, “sixty winters have checked the tides of passion in my veins, but the indignation of my soul against any insult offered to my daughter’s delicacy, or to the name of the lord regent of Scotland, is not less powerful in my breast. You are my prisoner, and I pardon what I could so easily avenge. I will even answer you, and say that I do not know of any exclusive affection subsisting between my daughter and Sir William Wallace; but this I am assured of, that were it the case she would be more ennobled in being the wife of so true a patriot and so virtuous a man than were she advanced to the bosom of an emperor. And for myself, were he to-morrow hurled by a mysterious providence from his present nobly-won elevation, I should glory in my son, were he such, and would think him as great on a scaffold as on a throne.”

“It is well that is your opinion,” replied De Valence, stopping in his wrathful strides, and turning on Mar with vengeful irony; “cherish these heroics, for you will assuredly see him so exalted! Then where will be his triumphs over Edward’s arms and Pembroke’s heart? Where your daughter’s patriot husband; your glorious son? Start not, old man, for by all the powers of hell I swear that some eyes which now look proudly on the Southron host shall close in blood!”

“If they do,” replied Mar, “it must be by the agency of devils; and their minister will meet the vengeance of the Eternal arm.”

“These dreams,” cried De Valence, “cannot terrify me. You are neither a seer, nor I a fool, to be taken by such prophecies. But were you wise enough to embrace the advantage I offer, you might be a prophet of good, greater than he of Ercildown, to your nation; for all that you could promise I would take care should be fulfilled. But you cast from you your peace and safety; my vengeance shall therefore take its course. I rely not on oracles of heaven or hell, but I have pronounced the doom of my enemies; and though you now see me a prisoner, tremble, haughty Scot, at the resentment which lies in this head and heart. This arm, perhaps, needs not the armies of Edward to pierce you in your boast!”

He left the room as he spoke; and Lord Mar, shaking his head, said to himself—“Impotent rage of passion and of youth, I pity and forgive you.”

It was not, therefore, so extraordinary that De Valence, when he saw Wallace descending the Ochil hills with the flying

banners of new victories, should break into curses of his fortune, and swear inwardly the most determined revenge.

Fuel was added to this fire at sunset, when the almost measureless defiles of prisoners marshalled before the ramparts of Stirling, and taking the usual oath to Wallace, met his view.

"To-morrow we quit these dishonouring walls," cried he to himself; "but ere I leave them, if there be power in gold or strength in my arm, he shall die!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE STATE-PRISON.

THE regent's re-entrance into the citadel of Stirling, being on the evening preceding the day he had promised should see the English lords depart for their country, De Warenne, as a mark of respect to a man whom he could not but regard with admiration, went to the barbican-gate to bid him welcome.

Wallace appeared; and as the cavalcade of noble Southrons who had lately commanded beyond the Tay followed him, Murray glanced around, and said with a smile to De Warenne, "You see, sir earl, how we Scots keep our word!" and then he added, "You leave Stirling to-morrow, but these remain till Lord Douglas opens their prison doors."

"I cannot but acquiesce in the justice of your commander's determination," returned De Warenne; "and to comfort these gentlemen under their captivity, I can only tell them that if anything can reconcile them to the loss of liberty, it is being the prisoners of Sir William Wallace."

After having transferred his captives to the charge of Lord Mar, Wallace went alone to the chamber of Montgomery to see whether the state of his wounds would allow him to march on the morrow. While he was yet there, an invitation arrived from the Countess of Mar, requesting his presence at an entertainment which she meant to give that night at Snawdown to the Southron lords before their departure for England.

"I fear you dare not expend your strength on this party?" inquired Wallace, turning to Montgomery.

"Certainly not," returned he; "but I shall see you amidst your noble friends at some future period. When the peace your arms must win is established between the two nations, I shall then revisit Scotland, and openly declare my friendship for Sir William Wallace."

"As these are your sentiments," replied Wallace, "I hope that you will unite your influence with that of the Earl of Gloucester, to persuade your king to stop this bloodshed, for it is no vain boast to declare that he may bury Scotland beneath her slaughtered sons, but they never will again consent to acknowledge any right in an usurper."

"Sanguinary have been the instruments of my sovereign's rule in Scotland," replied Montgomery; "but such cruelty is foreign from his gallant heart. Allow me, noblest of Scots, to plead one word in vindication of him to whom my allegiance is pledged. Had he come hither conducted by war alone, what would Edward have been worse than any other conqueror? But on the reverse, was not his right to the supremacy of Scotland acknowledged by the princes who contended for the crown? And besides, did not all the great lords swear fealty to England on the day he nominated their king?"

"Had you not been under these impressions, Montgomery, I believe I never should have seen you in arms against Scotland, but I will remove them by a simple answer. All the princes whom you speak of, excepting Bruce of Annandale, did assent to the newly-offered claim of Edward on Scotland; but who amongst them had any probable chance for the throne but Bruce and Baliol? Such ready acquiescence was meant to create them one. Bruce, conscious of his inherent rights, rejected the iniquitous demand of Edward; Baliol accorded with it, and was made a king. All our chiefs who were base enough to worship the rising sun, swore to the falsehood. Others remained gloomily silent; and the bravest of them retired to the Highlands, where they dwelt amongst their mountains till the cries of Scotland called them again to fight her battles.

"Thus did Edward establish himself as the liege lord of the kingdom; and whether the oppression which followed were his or his agents' immediate acts it matters not, for he made them his own by his after-conduct. When remonstrances were sent to London, he neither punished nor reprimanded the delinquents, but marched an armed force into our country to compel us to be trampled on. Was this honour? Was this the right of conquest? Alexander would have blushed, and Charlemagne turned pale, at the bare suspicion of being capable of such a deed.

"No, Lord Montgomery, it is not our conqueror we are opposing ; it is a traitor, who, under the mask of friendship, has attempted to usurp our rights, destroy our liberties, and make a desert of our once happy country. This is the true statement of the case : and though I wish not to make a subject outrage his sovereign, yet truth demands of you to say to Edward, that to withdraw his pretensions from this exhausted country, is the restitution we may justly claim—is all that we wish. Let him leave us in peace, and we shall no longer make war upon him. But if he persist, even as Samson drew the temple on himself to destroy his enemies, Scotland will discharge itself upon the valleys of England, and compel them to share the fate in which we may be doomed to perish."

"I will think of this discourse," returned Montgomery, "when I am far distant ; and rely on it that I will assert the privilege of my birth, and counsel my king as becomes an honest man."

"Highly would he estimate such counsel," cried Wallace, "had he virtue to feel that he who will be unjust to his sovereign's enemies must be of an honour that will bind him with double fidelity to his king. Such proof give your sovereign ; and, if he have one spark of that greatness of mind which you say he possesses, though he may not adopt your advice, he must respect the adviser."

As Wallace pressed the hand of his new friend to leave him to repose, a messenger entered from Lord Mar to request the regent's presence in his closet. He found him with Lord de Warenne.

The latter presented him with another despatch from the Prince of Wales. It was to say that news had reached him of Wallace's design to attack the castles garrisoned by England on the eastern coast. Should this information prove true, he (the prince) declared that, as a punishment for such increasing audacity, he would put Lord Douglas into closer confinement ; and while the Southron fleets would inevitably baffle Wallace's attempts, the moment the exchange of prisoners was completed on the borders, an army from England should enter Scotland, and ravage it with fire and sword.

When Wallace had heard this despatch, he smiled and said : "The deed is done, my Lord de Warenne. Both the castles and the fleets are taken, and what punishment must we now expect from this terrible threatener ? "

"Little from him or his headlong counsellors," replied De Warenne; "but Thomas, Earl of Lancaster, the king's nephew, is come from abroad with a numerous army. He is to conduct the Scottish prisoners to the borders, and then to fall upon Scotland with all his strength, unless you previously surrender not only Berwick, but Stirling, and the whole of the district between the Forth and the Tweed, into his hands."

"My Lord de Warenne," replied Wallace, "you can expect but one return to these absurd demands. I shall accompany you myself to the Scottish borders, and there make my reply."

De Warenne, who did indeed look for this answer, replied: "I anticipated that such would be your determination: and I have to regret that the wild counsels which surround my prince precipitate him into conduct which must draw much blood on both sides, before his royal father's presence can regain what he has lost."

"Ah, my lord," replied Wallace, "is it to be nothing but war? Have you now a stronghold of any force in all the Highlands? Not a blade of grass would I disturb on the other side of the Cheviot if we might have peace. Let Edward yield us that, and though he has pierced us with many wounds, we will yet forgive him."

De Warenne shook his head: "I know my king too well to expect pacific measures. He may die with the sword in his hand, but he will never grant an hour's repose to this country till it submits to his sceptre."

"Then," replied Wallace, "the sword must be the portion of him and his."

A flush overspread the face of De Warenne at this apostrophe, and forcing a smile. "This strict notion of right," said he, "is very well in declamation, but how would it crop the wings of conquerors, and shorten the warrior's arm, did they measure by this rule!"

"How would it, indeed!" replied Wallace; "and that they should is most devoutly to be wished. All warfare that is not defensive is criminal; and he who draws his sword to oppress or merely to aggrandise, is a murderer and a robber. This is the plain truth, Lord de Warenne."

"I have never considered it in that light," returned the earl, "nor shall I turn philosopher now. I revere your principle, Sir William Wallace, but it is too sublime to be mine. Nay, nor would it be politic for one who holds his possessions in

England by the right of conquest to question the virtue of the deed. By the sword my ancestors gained their estates, and with the sword I have no objection to extend my territories."

Wallace now saw that De Warenne, though a man of honour, was not one of virtue. Though his amiable nature made him gracious in the midst of hostility, and his good dispositions would not allow him to act disgracefully in any concern, yet duty to God seemed a poet's flight to him.

Wallace did not answer his remark, and the conference soon closed.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

CHAPEL IN SNAWDOWN.

THOUGH burning with stifled passions, Earl de Valence accepted the invitation of Lady Mar. He hoped to see Helen to gain her ear for a few minutes, and, above all, to find some opportunity during the entertainment of taking his meditated revenge on Wallace. The dagger seemed the surest way, for, could he render the blow effectual, he should not only destroy the rival of his wishes, but, by ridding his monarch of a powerful foe, deserve every honour at the royal hands. Love and ambition again swelled his breast, and with recovered spirits, and a glow on his countenance, he accompanied De Warenne to the palace.

The hall for the feast was arrayed with feudal grandeur. The seats at the table, spread for the knights of both countries, were covered with highly-wrought stuffs, while the emblazoned banners and other armorial trophies of the nobles being hung aloft according to the degree of the owner, each knight saw his precedence, and where to take his place.

Resentful alike at his captivity and thwarted passion, De Valence had hitherto refused to show himself beyond the ramparts of the citadel; he was therefore surprised, on entering the hall of Snawdoun with De Warenne, to see such regal pomp, and at the command of the woman who had so lately been his prisoner at Dumbarton, and whom he had treated with the most rigorous contempt. Forgetting these indignities, in the pride of displaying her present consequence, Lady Mar came forward to receive her illustrious guests. Her dress corresponded with the magnificence of the banquets; a robe of cloth of Baudkins enriched the beauties of her person; her

wimple blazed with jewels, and a superb carkanet emitted its various rays from her bosom.*

De Warenne followed her with his eye as she moved from him. With an unconscious sigh, he whispered to De Valence, "What a land is this, where all the women are fair, and the men all brave!"

"I wish that it, and all its men and women, were in perdition!" returned De Valence, in a fierce tone.

The chieftains of the Scottish army, with the Lords Buchan and March, were assembled around the countess at the moment a shout from the populace without announced the arrival of the regent. His noble figure was now disencumbered of armour, and with no more sumptuous garb than the simple plaid of his country, he appeared effulgent in manly beauty and the glory of his recent deeds. De Valence frowned heavily as he looked on him, and thanked his fortunate stars that Helen was absent from sharing the admiration which seemed to animate every breast.

The entertainment was conducted with every regard to that chivalric courtesy which a noble conqueror always pays to the vanquished. Indeed, from the wit and pleasantry which passed from the opposite sides of the tables, and in which the ever-gay Murray was the leader, it rather appeared a convivial meeting of friends than an assemblage of mortal foes. During the banquet the bards sang legends of the Scottish worthies who had brought honour to their nation in days of old, and as the board was cleared they struck at once into a full chorus. Wallace caught the sound of his own name, accompanied with epithets of extravagant praise; he rose hastily from his chair, and with his hand motioned them to cease. They obeyed; but Lady Mar remonstrating with him, he smilingly said it was an ill omen to sing a warrior's actions till he were incapable of performing more, and therefore he begged she would excuse him from hearkening to his.

"Then let us change their strains to a dance," replied the countess.

"A hall! a hall!" exclaimed Murray, springing from his seat, delighted with the proposal.

"I have no objection," answered Wallace; and putting the

* Cloth of Baudkins was one of the richest stuffs worn in the thirteenth century. It is said to have been composed of silk interwoven with gold. The carkanet was a large broad necklace of precious stones of all colours, set in various shapes, and fastened in gold links into each.

hand she presented to him into that of Lord de Warenne, he added, "I am not of a sufficiently gay temperament to grace the change, but this earl may not have the same reason for declining so fair a challenge!"

Lady Mar coloured with mortification, for she had thought Wallace would not venture to refuse before so many, but following the impulse of De Warenne's arm, she proceeded to the other end of the hall, where, by Murray's quick arrangement, the younger lords of both countries had already singled out ladies, and were marshalled for the dance.

As the hours moved on, the spirits of Wallace subsided from their usual cheering tone into a sadness which he thought might be noticed: and wishing to escape observation, and whispering to Mar that he would go for an hour to visit Montgomery, he withdrew, unnoticed by all but his watchful enemy.

De Valence, who hovered about his steps, had heard him inquire of Lady Ruthven why Helen was not present. He was within hearing of this whisper also, and, with a satanic joy, the dagger shook in his hand. He knew that Wallace had many a solitary place to pass between Snawdown and the citadel; and the company being too pleasantly absorbed to mark who entered or disappeared, he took an opportunity and stole out after him.

But for once the impetuous fury of hatred met a temporary disappointment. While De Valence was cowering like a thief under the eaves of the houses, and prowling along the lonely paths to the citadel, while he started at every noise, as if it came to apprehend him for his meditated deed, or rushed forward at the sight of any solitary passenger, whom his eager vengeance almost mistook for Wallace—Wallace himself had taken a different track.

As he walked through the illuminated archways which led from the hall he perceived a darkened passage. He followed it for a considerable time, and at last was stopped by a door. It yielded to his hand, and he found himself at the entrance of a large building. He advanced, and passing a high screen of carved oak, by a dim light, which gleamed from waxen tapers on the altar, he perceived it to be the chapel.

"A happy transition!" said he to himself, "from the jubilant scene I have now left—from the grievous scenes I have lately shared! Here, gracious God," thought he, "may I, unseen by any other eye, pour out my heart to Thee. And

here will I declare my thanksgiving for Thy mercies ; and with my tears wash from my soul the blood I have been compelled to shed."

While advancing towards the altar, he was startled by a voice proceeding from the quarter whither he was going, and with low and gently breathed fervour, uttering these words :— " Defend him day and night from the devices of this wicked man, and above all, during these hours of revelry and confidence guard his unshielded breast from treachery and death." The voice faltered and added with greater agitation, " Ah, unhappy me, that I should be the cause of danger to the hope of Scotland ; that I should pluck peril on the head of William Wallace ! " A figure, which had been hidden by the rails of the altar, with these words rose, and stretching forth her clasped hands, exclaimed, " But Thou, who knowest I had no blame in this, wilt not afflict me by his danger ! Thou wilt deliver him, O God, out of the hand of this cruel foe ! "

Wallace was not more astonished at hearing that some one in whom he reposed was his secret enemy than at seeing Lady Helen in that place at that hour, and addressing heaven for him. There was something so celestial in the maid, as she stood in her white robes before the divine footstool, that, although her prayers were delivered with a pathos which told they sprang from a heart more than commonly interested in their object, yet every word and look breathed so eloquently the virgin purity of her soul, the hallowed purpose of her petitions, that Wallace, drawn by the sympathy with which kindred virtues ever attract spirit to spirit, did not hesitate to discover himself. He stepped from the shadow which involved him. The pale light of the tapers shone upon his advancing figure. Helen's eyes fell upon him as she turned round. She was transfixed and silent. He moved forward. " Lady Helen," said he, in a respectful and even tender voice. At the sound a fearful rush of shame seemed to overwhelm her faculties, for she knew not how long he might have been in the church, and that he had not heard her beseech heaven to make him less the object of her thoughts. She sank on her knees beside the altar, and covered her face with her hands.

The action, the confusion, might have betrayed her secret to Wallace. But he only thought of her pious invocations for his safety ; he only remembered that it was she who had given a holy grave to the only woman he could ever love ; and, full of

gratitude, as a pilgrim would approach a saint, he drew near to her. "Holiest of earthly maids," said he, kneeling down beside her; "in this lonely hour, in the sacred presence of Almighty Purity, receive my soul's thanks for the prayers I have this moment heard you breathe for me! They are more precious to me, Lady Helen, than the generous plaudits of my country; they are a greater reward to me than would have been the crown with which Scotland sought to endow me; for do they not give me—what all the world cannot—the protection of heaven?"

"I would pray for it," softly answered Helen, but not venturing to look up.

"The prayer of meek goodness, we know, 'availeth much.' Continue, then, to offer up that incense for me," added he, "and I shall march forth to-morrow with redoubled strength, for I shall think, holy maid, that I have yet a Marion to pray for me on earth as well as one in heaven!"

Lady Helen's heart beat at these words, but it was with no unhallowed emotion. She withdrew her hands from her face, and clasping them, looked up. "Marion will indeed echo all my prayers; and He who reads my heart will, I trust, grant them! They are for your life, Sir William Wallace," added she, turning to him with agitation, "for it is menaced."

"I will inquire by whom," answered he, "when I have paid my duty at this altar for guarding it so long. And dare I ask you to unite the voice of your gentle spirit with the secret one of mine? I would beseech heaven for pardon on my own transgressions; I would ask of its mercy to establish the liberty of Scotland. Pray with me, Lady Helen, and the invocations our souls utter will meet the promise of Him who said, 'Where two or three are joined together in prayer there am I in the midst of them.'"

Helen looked on him with a holy smile, and pressing the crucifix which she held to her lips, bowed her head on it in mute assent. Wallace threw himself prostrate on the steps of the altar, and the fervour of his sighs alone breathed to his companion the deep devotion of his soul. How the time passed he knew not, so absorbed was he in the communion which his spirit held in heaven with the most gracious of beings; but the bell of the palace striking the matin hour reminded him he was yet on earth, and looking up his eyes met those of Helen. His rosary hung on his arm, he kissed it. "Wear this,

holy maid," said he, "in remembrance of this hour!" She bowed her fair neck, and he put the consecrated chain over it. "Let it bear witness to a friendship," added he, clasping her hands in his, "which will be cemented by eternal ties in heaven."

Helen bent her face upon his hands; he felt the sacred tears of so pure a compact upon them; and while he looked up, as if he thought the spirit of his Marion hovered near to bless a communion so remote from all infringement of the sentiment he had dedicated for ever to her, Helen raised her head, and, with a terrible shriek, throwing her arms around the body of Wallace, he, that moment, felt an assassin's steel in his back, and she fell senseless on his breast. He started on his feet; a dagger fell from his wound to the ground, but the hand which had struck the blow he could nowhere see. To search further was then impossible, for Helen lay on his bosom like one dead. Not doubting that she had seen his assailant, and fainted from alarm, he was laying her on the steps of the altar, that he might bring some water from the basin of the chapel to recover her, when he saw that her arm was not only stained with his blood, but streaming with her own. The dagger had gashed it in reaching him.

"Execrable villain!" cried he, turning cold at the sight, and instantly comprehending that it was to defend him she had thrown her arms around him, he exclaimed, in a voice of agony, "Are two of the most matchless women the earth ever saw to die for me!" Trembling with alarm, and with renewed grief—for the terrible scene of Elderslie was now brought in all its horrors before him—he tore off her veil to staunch the blood, but the cut was too wide for his surgery, and, losing every other consideration in fears for her life, he again took her in his arms, and bore her out of the chapel. He hastened through the dark passages, and almost flying along the lighted galleries, entered the hall. The noisy fright of the servants as he broke through their ranks at the door, alarmed the revellers; and turning round, what was their astonishment to behold the regent, pale and streaming with blood, bearing in his arms a lady apparently lifeless, and covered with the same dreadful hue!

Mar instantly recognised his daughter, and rushed towards her with a cry of horror. Wallace sank, with his breathless load, upon the nearest bench, and, while her head rested on his

bosom, ordered surgery to be brought. Lady Mar gazed on the spectacle with a benumbed dismay. None present durst ask a question, till a priest drawing near unwrapped the arm of Helen, and discovered its deep wound.

"Who has done this!" cried her father to Wallace, with all the anguish of a parent in his countenance.

"I know not," replied he; "but, I believe, some villain who aimed at my life."

"Where is Lord de Valence?" exclaimed Mar, suddenly recollecting his menaces against Wallace.

"I am here," replied he, in a composed voice; "would you have me seek the assassin?"

"No, no," cried the earl, ashamed of his suspicions; "but here has been some foul work—and my daughter is slain."

"Oh, not so!" cried Murray, who had hurried towards the group, and knelt at her side; "she will not die—so much excellence cannot die." A stifled groan from Wallace, accompanied by a look, told Murray that he had known the death of similar excellence. With this unanswerable appeal, the young chieftain dropped his head on the other hand of Helen; and, could any one have seen his face, they would have beheld tears of agony drawn from that ever-gay heart.

The wound was closed by the aid of another surgical priest who had followed the former into the hall, and Helen sighed convulsively. At this intimation of recovery the priest made all, excepting those who supported her, stand back. But, as Lady Mar lingered near Wallace, she saw the paleness of his countenance turn to a deadly hue, and his eyes closing, he sank back on the bench. Her shrieks now resounded through the hall, and, falling into hysterics, she was taken into the gallery, while the more collected Lady Ruthven remained to attend the victims before her.

At the instant Wallace fell, De Valence, losing all self-command, caught hold of De Warrenne's arm, and whispering, "I thought it was sure; long live King Edward!" rushed out of the hall. These words revealed to De Warrenne who was the assassin; and though struck to the soul with the turpitude of the deed, he thought the honour of England would not allow him to accuse the perpetrator, and he remained silent.

The inanimate form of Wallace was now drawn from under that of Helen, and, in the act, discovered the tapestry seat clotted with blood, and the regent's back bathed in the same

vital stream. Having found his wound, the priests laid him on the ground, and were administering their balsams when Helen opened her eyes.

"Helen! Helen! dear Helen!" cried Murray, clinging to her hand; "while you live, what that loves you can die!"

While these acclamations surrounded her couch, Edwin, in speechless apprehension, supported the insensible head of Wallace; and De Warenne, inwardly execrating the perfidy of De Valence, knelt down to assist the good friars in their office.

A few minutes longer, and the staunch blood refluxing the chieftain's heart, he too opened his eyes, and instantly turning on his arm—"What has happened to me! Where is Lady Helen?" demanded he.

At his voice, Helen, bursting into a shower of tears, breathed out her rapturous thanks to God. Her low murmurs reached the ears of Wallace.

The dimness having left his eyes, and the blood being stopped by an embalmed bandage, he seemed to feel no impediment from his wound, and rising hastened to the side of Helen. Lord Mar softly whispered his daughter. "Sir William Wallace is at your feet, my dearest child; look on him, and tell him that you live."

"I am well, my father," returned she, in a faltering voice; "and may it indeed please the Almighty to preserve him!"

"I, too, am alive and well," answered Wallace; "but thanks to God, and to you, blessed lady, that I am so! Had not that lovely arm received the greater part of the dagger, it must have reached my heart."

An exclamation of horror at what might have been burst from the lips of Edwin. Helen could have re-echoed it, but she now held her feelings under too severe a rein to allow them so to speak.

"Thanks to the Protector of the just," cried she, "for your preservation! Who raised my eyes to see the assassin! His cloak was held before his face, and I could not discern it; but I saw a dagger aimed at the back of Sir William Wallace! How I caught it I cannot tell, for I seemed to die on the instant."

Lady Mar having recovered, re-entered the hall just as Wallace had knelt down beside Helen. Maddened with the sight of the man on whom her soul doted in such a position

before her rival, she advanced hastily ; and in a voice, which she vainly attempted to render composed and gentle, sternly addressed her daughter-in-law. " Alarmed as I have been by your apparent danger, I cannot but be uneasy at the attendant circumstances ; tell me, therefore, and satisfy this anxious company, how it happened that you should be with the regent, when we supposed you an invalid in your room, and were told he was gone to the citadel."

A crimson blush overspread the cheeks of Helen at this question, for it was delivered in a tone which insinuated that something more than accident had occasioned their meeting ; but she answered, " I was in the chapel at prayers ; Sir William Wallace entered with the same design ; and at the moment he desired me to mingle mine with his, this assassin appeared ; and I saw his dagger raised against our protector, and I saw no more."

There was not a heart present that did not give credence to this account but the polluted one of Lady Mar. Jealousy almost laid it bare. She smiled incredulously, and turning to the company, " Our noble friends will accept my apology, if in so delicate an investigation I should beg that my family alone may be present."

Wallace perceived the tendency of her words, and not doubting the impression they might make on the minds of men ignorant of the virtues of Lady Helen, he instantly rose. " For once," cried he, " I must counteract a lady's orders. It is my wish, lords, that you will not leave this place till I explain how I came to disturb the devotions of Lady Helen. Wearied with festivities, in which my alienated heart can so little share, I thought to pass an hour with Lord Montgomery in the citadel, and in seeking to avoid the crowded avenues of the palace I entered the chapel. To my surprise I found Lady Helen there. I heard her pray for the happiness of Scotland, for the safety of her defenders ; and my mind being in a frame to join in such petitions, I apologised for my unintentional intrusion, and begged permission to mingle my devotions with hers. Nay, impressed and privileged by the sacredness of the place, I presumed still further, and before the altar of purity poured forth my gratitude for the duties she had paid to the remains of my murdered wife. It was at this moment that the assassin appeared. I heard Lady Helen scream, I felt her fall on my breast, and at that instant the dagger entered my back. This

is the history of our meeting ; and the assassin, whomsoever he may be, and how long soever he was in the church before he sought to perpetrate the deed, were he to speak, and capable of uttering truth, could declare no other."

"But where is he to be found ?" demanded Lady Mar.

"If his testimony be necessary to validate mine," returned Wallace, with dignity, "I believe Lady Helen can point to his name."

"Name him, Helen ; name him, my dear cousin !" cried Murray, "that I may have some link with thee ; O ! let me avenge this deed ! Tell me his name ! and so yield me all that thou canst bestow on Andrew Murray !"

There was something in the tone of Murray's voice that penetrated to the heart of Helen. "I cannot name him whom I suspect to any but Sir William Wallace ; and I would not do it to him," replied she, "were it not to warn him against future danger. I did not see the assassin's face, therefore, how dare I set you to take vengeance on one who perchance may be innocent ? I forgive him my blood, since heaven has spared to Scotland its protector's."

"If he be a Southron," cried Baron Hilton, coming forward, "name him, gracious lady, and I will answer for it that were he son of a king he would meet death from our monarch for this unknighly outrage."

"I thank your zeal, brave chief," replied she, "but I would not abandon to certain death even a wicked man. May he repent ! I will name him to Sir William Wallace alone, and when he knows his secret enemy the vigilance of his own honour, I trust, will be his guard. Meanwhile, my father, I would withdraw." Then whispering to him, she was lifted in his arms and Murray's, and carried from the hall.

CHAPTER XL.

THE CARSE OF STIRLING.

DAYBREAK gleamed over the sky before the wondering spectators of the late extraordinary scene had dispersed to their quarters.

De Warenne was so well convinced by what had dropped from De Valence of his having been the assassin that when they met at sunrise to take horse for the borders he made him no other

salutation than an exclamation of surprise "not to find him under an arrest for the last night's work!"

"The wily Scot knew better," replied De Valence, "than to expose the reputation of the lady. He knew that she received the wound in his arms, and he durst not seize me for fear I should proclaim it."

"He cannot fear that," replied De Warenne, "for he has proclaimed it himself. He has told every particular of his meeting with Lady Helen in the chapel, even her sheltering him with *her arms*, so there is nothing for you to declare but your own infamy. For infamous I must call it, Lord Aymer, and nothing but the respect I owe my country prevents me from pointing the eyes of the indignant Scots to you; nothing but the stigma your exposure would bring upon the English name could make me conceal the deed."

De Valence laughed at this speech of De Warenne's. "Why, my lord warden," said he, "have you been taking lessons of this doughty Scot that you talk thus? It was not with such sentiments you overthrew the princes of Wales, and made the kings of Ireland fly before you! You would tell another story were your own interest in question, and I can tell you that my vengeance is not satisfied. Maid or wife Helen shall be torn from his arms, and if I cannot make her a virgin bride she shall at least be mine as his widow, for I swear not to be disappointed."

"Shame, De Valence! I should blush to owe my courage to rivalry, or my perseverance in the field to a licentious passion! You know what you have confessed to me were once your designs on Helen Mar."

"Every man according to his nature!" returned De Valence; and shrugging his shoulders, he mounted his horse.

The cavalcade of Southrons now appeared. They were met on the Carse by the regent, who, not regarding the smart of a closing wound, advanced at the head of ten thousand men to see his prisoners over the borders. By Helen's desire, Lord Mar had informed Wallace what had been the threats of De Valence, and that she suspected him to be the assassin. But this suspicion was put beyond a doubt by the evidence of the dagger, which Edwin had found in the chapel; its hilt was enamelled with the martlets of De Valence.

At the sight of it a general indignation filled the Scottish chiefs, and assembling round their regent, with one breath they

demanding that the false earl should be detained and punished as became the honour of nations, for so execrable a breach of all laws, human and divine. Wallace replied that he believed the attack to have been instigated by a personal motive, and therefore, as he was the object, not the state of Scotland, he should merely acquaint the earl that his villainy was known, and let the shame of disgrace be his punishment.

"Ah!" observed Bothwell, "men who trample on conscience soon get over shame."

"True," replied Wallace, "but I suit my actions to my own mind, not to my enemies; and if he cannot feel dishonour, I will not so far disparage myself as to think one so base worthy of my resentment."

While he was quieting the indignation of his nobles, whose blood began to boil afresh at sight of the assassin, the Southron lords, conducted by Lord Mar, approached. When that nobleman drew near, Wallace's first inquiry was for Lady Helen. The earl informed him he had received intelligence of her having slept without fever, and that she was not awake when the messenger came off with his good tidings. That all was likely to be well with her was comfort to Wallace; and, with an unruffled brow, riding up to the squadron of Southrons which was headed by De Warenne and De Valence, he immediately approached the latter, and drawing out the dagger, held it towards him: "The next time, sir earl," said he, "that you draw this dagger, let it be with a more knightly aim than assassination."

De Valence, surprised, took it in confusion, and without answer; but his countenance told the state of his mind. He was humbled by the man he hated, and while a sense of the disgrace he had incurred tore his proud soul, he had not dignity enough to acknowledge the generosity of his enemy in again giving him a life which his treachery had so often forfeited. Having taken the dagger, he wreaked the exasperated vengeance of his malice upon the senseless steel, and breaking it asunder, threw the pieces into the air, while turning from Wallace with an affected disdain, he exclaimed to the shivered weapon, "You shall not betray me again!"

"Nor you betray our honours, Lord de Valence," exclaimed Earl de Warenne: "and therefore, though the nobleness of Sir William Wallace leaves you at large after this outrage on his person, we will assert our innocence of connivance with the

deed, and, as lord warden of this realm, I order you under an arrest till we pass the Scottish lines."

"'Tis well," cried Hilton, "that such is your determination, my lord, else no honest man could have continued in the same company with one who has so tarnished the English name!"

"No!" cried his brother baron, venerable Blenkinsopp, reining up his steed; "I would forfeit house and lands first."

De Valence, with an ironical smile, looked towards the squadron which approached to obey De Warenne, and haughtily answered, "Though it be dishonour to you to march with me out of Scotland, the proudest of you all will deem it an honour to be allowed to return with me hither. I have an eye on those who stand with cap in hand to rebellion. And for you, Sir William Wallace," added he, turning to him, who was also curbing his impatient charger, "I hold no terms with a rebel; and deem all honour that would rid my sovereign and the earth of such low-born arrogance."

Before Wallace could answer, he saw De Valence struck from his horse by the Lochaber axe of Edwin. Indignant at the insult offered to his beloved commander, he had suddenly raised his arm, and aiming a blow with all his strength, the earl was immediately stunned and precipitated to the ground.

At the sight of the fall of the Southron chief, the Scottish troops, aware of there being some misunderstanding between their regent and the English lords, uttered a shout. Wallace, to prevent an accident, sent instantly to the lines to appease the tumult, and throwing himself off his horse, hastened to the prostrate earl. A fearful pause reigned throughout the Southron ranks. They did not know but that the enraged Scots would now fall on them, and, in spite of their regent, exterminate them on the spot. The troops were running forward when Wallace's messengers arrived and checked them, and himself, calling to Edwin, stopped his further chastisement of the recovering earl.

"Edwin, you have done wrong," cried he; "give me that weapon which you have sullied by raising it against a prisoner totally in our power."

With a vivid blush the noble boy resigned the weapon to his general; yet, with an unappeased glance on the prostrate De Valence, he exclaimed, "But have you not granted life twice to this prisoner? and has he not, in return, raised his hand against your life and Lady Helen? You pardon him again,

and, in the moment of your clemency, he insults the lord regent of Scotland in the face of both nations ! I could not hear this and live without making him feel that you have those about you who will not forgive such crimes."

"Had not the lord regent power to punish ?" returned Wallace. "And if he sees right to hold his hand those who strike for him invade his dignity. I should be unworthy the honour of protecting a brave nation did I stoop to tread on every reptile that stings me in my path. Leave Lord de Valence to the sentence his commander has pronounced, and as an expiation for your having offended both military and moral law this day you must remain in Stirling till I return into Scotland."

De Valence, hardly awake from the stupor which the blow of the battle-axe had occasioned, was raised from the ground ; and soon after coming to himself, and being made sensible of what had happened, he was taken, foaming with rage and mortification, into the centre of the Southron lines.

Alarmed at the confusion he saw at a distance, Lord Montgomery ordered his litter round from the rear to the front, and hearing all that had passed joined De Warenne in pleading for the abashed Edwin.

"His youth and zeal," cried Montgomery, "are sufficient to excuse the intemperance of the deed."

"No !" interrupted Edwin ; "I have offended, and I will expiate. Only, my honoured lord," said he, approaching Wallace, while he checked the emotion which would have flowed from his eyes, "when I am absent, sometimes remember that it was Edwin's love which hurried him into this disgrace."

"My dear Edwin," returned Wallace, "there are many impetuous spirits in Scotland who need the lesson I now enforce upon you. Farewell till we meet again !"

Edwin kissed Wallace's hand in silence, and drawing his bonnet hastily over his eyes, he retired into the rear of Lord Mar's party. The tramping of the departing troops rolled over the ground like receding thunder. Edwin at last stole a look towards the plain ; he beheld a vast cloud of dust, but no more the squadrons of his friend.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE CHEVIOTS.

As Wallace pursued his march along the once fertile and well-peopled valleys of Clydesdale, their present appearance affected him like the sight of a friend whom he had seen depart in all the graces of youth and prosperity, but met again overcome with disease and wretchedness. The remains of villages were visible, but the blackness of ashes marked the walls of the ruined dwellings.

Wallace felt that he was passing through the country in which his Marion had been rifled of life, and as he moved along nature all around seemed to have partaken her death. As he rode over the moors which led towards the district of Crawford Lamington, those hills amidst which the beloved of his soul first drew breath, he became totally silent. Time rolled back ; he was no longer the regent of Scotland, but the lover of Marion Braidfoot. His heart beat in turning his horse down the defile which led direct to Lamington, but the scene was completely changed ; the groves in which he had so often wandered with her were gone ; they had been cut down for the very purpose of destroying that place, which had once been the abode of beauty and innocence, and of all the tender charities.

One shattered tower alone remained of the house of Lamington. The scathing of fire embrowned its sides, and the uprooted garden marked where the ravager had been. While his army marched before him along the heights of Crawford, Wallace slowly moved forward, musing on the scene. In turning the angle of a shattered wall his horse started, and the next moment he perceived an aged figure, wrapped in a dark plaid, emerging from the ground. At sight of the apparition, Murray, who accompanied his friend, and had hitherto kept silent, suddenly exclaimed, " I conjure you, honest Scot, ghost or man, give us a subject for conversation ; and as a beginning, pray tell me to whom this ruined tower belonged ? "

The sight of two warriors in the Scottish garb encouraged the old man. " Ruined, indeed, sir," replied he ; " and its story is very sad. When the Southrons, who hold Annandale, heard of the brave acts of Sir William Wallace, they sent an army to destroy this castle and domains, which are his in right, of the Lady Marion of Lamington. Sweet creature ! I hear they foully murdered her in Lanark."

Murray was smitten speechless at this information ; for had he suspected there was any private reason with Wallace for his silent lingering about this desolate spot, he would rather have drawn him away than have stopped to ask questions.

“ And did you know the Lady Marion ? ” inquired Wallace, in a voice so descriptive of what was passing in his heart, that the man turned towards him, and struck with his noble mien, he pulled off his bonnet, and bowing, answered, “ Did I know her ? She was nursed on these knees. And my wife, who cherished her infancy, in now within yon brae. It is our only home, for the Southrons burnt us out of the castle, where our young lady left us, when she went to be married to the brave young Wallace. He was as handsome a youth as ever the sun shone upon, and he loved my lady from a boy. I never shall forget the day when she stood on the top of that rock and let a garland he had made for her fall into the Clyde. Without more ado, never caring because it is the deepest here of any part of the river, he jumps in after it, and I after him : and well I did, for when I caught him by his bonny golden locks, he was insensible. His head had struck against a stone in the plunge, and a great cut was over his forehead. God bless him, a sorry scar it left ! but many I warrant have the Southrons now made on his comely countenance. I have never seen him since he grew a man.”

Gregory, the honest steward of Lammington, was now recognised in this old man's narration ; but time and hardship had so altered his appearance, that Wallace could not have otherwise recollected the ruddy age and active figure of his well-remembered companion, in the shaking limbs and pallid visage of the speaker. When he ended, the chief threw himself from his horse. He approached the old man ; with one hand he took off his helmet, and with the other, putting back the same golden locks, he said, “ Was the scar you speak of anything like this ? ” His face was now close to the eye of Gregory, who in the action, the words, and the mark, immediately recognising the young playmate of his happiest days, with an almost shriek of joy, threw himself on his neck and wept ; then looking up, with tears rolling over his cheeks, he exclaimed, “ O ! Power of Mercy, take me to Thyself, since my eyes have seen the deliverer of Scotland ! ”

“ Not so, my venerable friend,” returned Wallace ; “ you must make these desolated regions bloom anew ! Decorate

them, Gregory, as you would do the tomb of your mistress. I give them to you and yours. Marion and I have no posterity. Let her foster-brother, if he still live, let him be now the laird of Lammington."

"He does live," replied the old man, "but the shadow of what he was. In attempting, with a few lads, to defend these domains he was severely wounded. Alas! the Southrons, in conquering Scotland, have not gained a kingdom but made a desert!"

"And there is a God who marks," returned Wallace; "I go to reap the harvests of Northumberland. What our enemies have ravished hence in part they shall refund: a few days and your granaries shall overflow."

Gregory fell at his feet, and begged that he might be allowed to bring his Annie to see the husband of her once dear child.

"Not now," replied Wallace; "I could not bear the interview; she shall see me when I return."

He then spoke apart to Murray, who cheerfully acquiesced in a commission that promised him not only the glory of being a conqueror, but the private satisfaction of driving the Southron garrison out of his own paternal castle. To send such news to his noble father at Stirling would indeed be a wreath of honour to his aged and yet warlike brow. It was then arranged between the young chief and his commander that watch-towers should be thrown up on every conspicuous eminence throughout the country, whence concerted signals of victories, or other information, might be interchanged. These preliminaries adjusted, the regent's bugle brought Ker and Sir John Graham to his side. The appointed number of men was left with Murray, and Wallace, joining his other chieftains, bade his friend and honest servant adieu.

He now awakened to a sense of the present scene, and speeded his legions over hill and dale, till they entered on the once luxuriant banks of the Annan—this territory of some of the noblest in Scotland, till Bruce, their chief, deserted them. It lay in more terrific ruin than even the tracts he had left. There reigned the silence of the tomb; here existed the expiring agonies of men left to perish. Recent marks of devastation smoked from the blood-stained earth; and in the midst of a barren waste, a few houseless wretches rushed forward at the sight of the regent, threw themselves before his horse, and begged a morsel of food for their famishing selves and dying infants. "Look," cried an almost frantic mother, holding

towards him the living skeleton of a child ; " my husband was slain by the Southrons, who hold Lochmaben Castle ; my subsistence was carried away, and myself turned forth, to give birth to this child on the rocks. We have fed till this hour on the wild berries ; but I die, and my child expires before me ! " A second group, with shrieks of despair, cried aloud, " Here are our young ones exposed to equal miseries. Give us bread, regent of Scotland, or we perish ! "

Wallace turned to his troops : " Fast for a day, my brave friends," cried he ; " lay the provisions you have brought with you before these people. To-morrow you shall feast on Southron tables."

He was instantly obeyed. As his men marched on, they threw their loaded wallets amongst the famishing groups ; and, followed by their blessings, descended with augmented speed the ravaged hills of Annandale. Dawn was brightening the dark head of Brunswark, as they advanced towards the Scottish boundary. At a distance lay the English camp, along the southern bank of the Esk. At this sight, Wallace ordered his bugles to sound. They were immediately answered by those of the opposite host. The heralds of both armies advanced, and the sun, rising from behind the eastern hills, shone full upon the legions of Scotland, winding down the romantic precipice of Wauchope.

Two hours arranged every preliminary of the exchange of prisoners ; and when the clarion of the trumpet announced that each party was to pass over the river to the side of its respective country, Wallace stood in the midst of his chieftains to receive the last adieus of his illustrious captives. The litter of Montgomery drew near—the curtains were thrown open—Wallace stretched out his hand to him : " The prayers of sainted innocence are thine."

" Never more shall her angel spirit behold me here, as you now behold me," returned Montgomery ; " I must be a traitor to virtue before I ever again bear arms against Sir William Wallace." Wallace pressed his hand, and they parted.

The escort which guarded De Valence advanced ; and the proud earl, seeing where his enemy stood, took off his gauntlet, and throwing it fiercely towards him, exclaimed, " Carry that to your minion, Ruthven, and tell him the hand that wore it will yet be tremendously revenged ! "

As the Southron ranks filed off towards Carlisle, those of the

returning Scottish prisoners approached their deliverer. Now it was that the full clangour of joy burst from every breast and triumph-breathing instrument in the Scottish legions ; now it was that the echoes rang with loud huzzas of " Long live the valiant Wallace, who brings our nobles out of captivity ! Long live our matchless regent ! "

As these shouts rent the air, the Lords Badenoch and Athol drew near. The princely head of the former bent with proud acknowledgment to the mild dignity of Wallace. Badenoch's penetrating eye saw that it was indeed the patriotic guardian of his country to whom he bowed, and not the vain affecter of regal power. At his approach, Wallace alighted from his horse, and received his offered hand and thanks with every grace inherent in his noble nature. " I am happy," returned he, " to have been the instrument of recalling to my country one of the princes of her royal blood." " And while one drop of it exists in Scotland," replied Badenoch, " its possessor must acknowledge the bravest of our defenders in Sir William Wallace."

Athol next advanced ; but his gloomy countenance contradicted his words when he attempted to utter a similar sense of obligation. Sir John Monteith was eloquent in his thanks. And Sir William Maitland was not less sincere in gratitude than Wallace was in joy at having given liberty to so near a relation of Helen Mar.

In pity to the wearied travellers, he ordered tents to be pitched ; and for the sake of their distant friends, he despatched a detachment to the top of Langholm Hill, to send forth a smoke in token to the Clydesdale watch of the armistice being ended. He had hardly seen it ascend the mountain when Graham arrived from reconnoitring, and told him that an English army of great strength were approaching by the foot of the more southern hills to take reposing Scots by surprise.

" They shall find us ready to receive them," was the prompt reply. Leaving the new-arrived Scots to rest on the banks of the Esk, he put himself at the head of five thousand men ; and despatching a thousand more with Sir John Graham, to pass the Cheviots, and be in ambush to attack the Southrons when he should give the signal, he marched swiftly forward, and soon fell in with some advanced squadrons of the enemy amongst the recesses of those hills. Little expecting such a rencontre, they were marching in defiles upon the lower ridgy craigs to avoid the swamps which occupied the broader way.

At the sight of the Scots, Lord Percy, the Southron commander, ordered a party of his archers to discharge their arrows. The artillery of war being thus opened afresh, Wallace drew his sword, and called aloud to his followers. His inspiring voice echoed from hill to hill; and the higher detachments of the Scots, pouring downwards with the impetuosity of their own mountain streams, precipitated their enemies into the valley; while Wallace, with his pikemen, charging the horse in those slippery paths, drove the terrified animals into the morasses, where some sank at once, and others, plunging, threw their riders, to perish in the swamp.

Desperate at the confusion which now ensued, as his archers fell headlong from the rocks, and his cavalry lay drowning before him, Lord Percy called up his infantry—they appeared, but though ten thousand strong, the determined Scots met their first ranks breast to breast; and levelling them with their companions, rushed on the rest with the force of a thunder-storm. It was at this period that the signal was given from the horn of Wallace, and the division of Graham, meeting the retreating Southrons as they attempted to form behind the hill, completed their defeat. The slaughter became dreadful, the victory decisive. Sir Ralph Latimer, the second in command, was killed in the first onset; and Lord Percy himself, after fighting as became his brave house, fled, covered with wounds, towards Alnwick.

CHAPTER XLII.

LOCHMABEN CASTLE.

THIS being the season of harvest in the northern counties of England, Wallace carried his reapers, not to lay their sickle to the field, but, with their swords, to open themselves a way into the Southron granaries.

The careful victor, meanwhile, provided for the wants of his friends on the other side of the Esk. The plunder of Percy's camp was despatched to them, which being abundant in all kinds of provisions, was more than sufficient to keep them in ample store till they could reach Stirling. From that point the released chiefs had promised they would disperse to their separate estates, collect recruits, and reduce the distracted state of the country into some composed order. Wallace had

disclosed his mode of effecting this renovation of public happiness before he left Stirling.

"They only require to be thoroughly known to be regarded as inestimable," added he ; "but while we raise around us the best bulwark of any nation, a brave and well-disciplined people ; while we teach them to defend their liberties, let us see that they deserve them. Let them be men contending for virtuous independence, not savages fighting for licentious unrestraint. And, while war is in our hands, let us in all things prepare for peace, that the sword may gently bend into the sickle, the dirk to the pruning-hook."

The graver council at Stirling had received his plan with enthusiasm. And when he submitted his design to them, rather to obtain their approbation as friends than to enforce it with the authority of a regent, all were struck with admiration, and Lord Badenoch could not but exclaim, "The royal qualities of this man can well afford this expense of humility. Bend as he will, he has only to speak to show his superiority over all, and to be sovereign."

There was a power in the unostentatious virtues of Wallace which subdued the princely spirit of Badenoch ; and while the proud chief recollected how he had contemned the pretensions of Bruce, and could not brook the elevation of Baliol ; how his soul was in arms when, after he had been persuaded to acknowledge the supremacy of Edward, the throne was given to one of his rivals, he wondered at himself to find that his very heart bowed before the gentle and comprehensive wisdom of an untitled regent.

Athol, alone of the group, seemed insensible to the benefits his country was deriving from its protector ; but he expressed his dissent from the general sentiment with no more visible sign than a cold silence.

When the messenger from Wallace arrived on the banks of the Esk, with so large a booty, and the news of his complete victory over the gallant Percy, the exultation of the Scottish nobles knew no bounds. On Badenoch opening the regent's despatches, he found they repeated his wish for his brave coadjutors to proceed to the execution of the plan they had sanctioned with their approbation : they were to march directly for Stirling, and in their way dispense the superabundance of the plunder amongst the perishing inhabitants of the land. He then informed the earl, that while the guard he had left

with him would escort the liberated Scots beyond the Forth, the remainder of the troops would be thus disposed—Lord Andrew Murray was to remain chief in command in Clydesdale ; Sir Eustace Maxwell to give up the wardship of Douglas to Sir John Monteith, and then advance into Annandale to assist Sir Roger Kirkpatrick, who must now have begun the reduction of the castles in the west of that province. At the close of this account, Wallace added, that he himself was going to traverse the English counties to the Tees mouth, and should heaven bless his arms, he would send the produce round by the Berwick fleet to replenish the exhausted stores of the Highlands. “Next year,” continued he, “I trust they will have ample harvests of their own.”

And what Wallace said he hoped to do, he did.

The Southrons’ country was panic-struck at the defeat of Percy, his beaten army gave such dreadful and hyperbolical accounts of their might, and of the prowess of their leader, that as soon as ever the Scottish spears were seen rising the summit of any hill, or gleaming along the horizon, every village was deserted, and corn and cattle, and every kind of property fell into the hands of the Scots.

Lord Percy lay immovable with wounds in his castle at Alnwick,* and his hopeless state, by intimidating his followers, contradicted the orders he gave to face the marauding enemy. They collected under arms, but the moment their foe appeared they fled within the castle walls, or buried themselves amongst the surrounding hills. Not a sheaf in the fields of Northumberland did the Scots leave to knead into bread for its earl—not a head of cattle to smoke upon his board. The country was sacked from sea to sea. But far different was its appearance from that of the trampled valleys of Scotland. There fire had burnt up the soil ; the hand of violence had levelled the husbandman’s cottage—had sacrificed himself on its smoking ashes ! There the fatherless babe wept, and at its side sat the distracted widow, wringing her hands in speechless misery, for there lay her murdered husband, here her perishing child !

With such sights the heart of Wallace had been pierced when he passed through the lowland counties of his country ; nay, as he scoured the highland districts of the Grampians, even there had he met cruel desolation. For thus it was that

* This famous castle, of so many heroic generations, is still the princely residence of the head of the house of Percy.

the Southron garrisons had provisioned themselves—by robbing the poor of their bread, and, when they resisted, firing their dwellings, and punishing the refractory with death.

But not so Sir William Wallace. His commission was, not to destroy, but to save ; and though he carried his victorious army to feed on the Southron plains, and sent the harvests of England to restore the wasted fields of Scotland, yet he did no more. No fire blasted his path—no innocent blood cried against him from the ground ! When the impetuous zeal of his soldiers, flushed with victory, and in the heat of vengeance, would have laid several hamlets in ashes, he seized the brand from the destroying party, and throwing it into an adjoining brook—“ Show yourselves worthy the advantages you have gained,” cried he, “ by the moderation with which you use them. What justice is there in destroying the habitations and lives of a set of harmless people, because the like cruelty has been committed by a lawless army of their countrymen upon our unoffending brethren ? Your hearts may make the answer. But if they are hardened against the pleadings of humanity, let prudence show your interest in leaving those men alive, and with their means unimpaired, who will produce other harvests, if need be, to fill our scantier granaries.”

According to the different dispositions of men, this reasoning prevailed. And from the end of September, when Wallace first entered Northumberland, to the month of November, when he returned to Scotland, not an offence was committed which could occasion his merciful spirit regret. It was on All Saints’ Day when he again approached the Esk ; and so great was his spoil that his return seemed more like some vast caravan moving the merchandise of half the world than the march of an army which had so lately passed that river, a famishing, though valorous host.

The outposts of Carlaverock soon informed Maxwell the lord regent was in sight. At the joyful intelligence a double smoke streamed from every watch-hill in Annandale, and Sir Eustace had hardly appeared on the Solway bank, to meet his triumphant chief, when the eager spirit of the rough knight of Torthorald brought him there also. Wallace was welcomed to the shore by the shouts not only of the soldiers which had followed Maxwell and Kirkpatrick, but of the people who came in crowds to hail their preserver. The squalid hue of famine had left every face, and each smiling countenance told Wallace

emphatically the wisdom of the means he had used to regenerate his country.

Maxwell had prepared the fortress of Lochmaben, the residence of Bruce, for the reception of the regent. And thither Wallace was conducted in prouder triumph than ever followed the chariot wheels of Cæsar. Blessings were the clarions that preceded him, and hosts of people, whom he had saved when ready to perish, were voluntary actors in his pageant.

When he arrived in sight of the two capacious lochs, which spread on each side of the castle, he turned to Graham, "What pity," said he, "that the rightful owner of this truly regal dwelling does not act as becomes his blood! He might now be entering its gates as a king, and Scotland find rest under its lawful monarch."

"But he prefers being a parasite in the court of a tyrant," replied Sir John; "and from such a school Scotland would reject its king."

"But he has a brave and generous son," replied Wallace. "I am told by Lord Montgomery, who knew him in Guienne, that a nobler spirit does not exist. On his brows, my dear Graham, we must hope one day to see the crown."

"Then only as your heir, my lord regent," interrupted Maxwell, "for while you live, I can answer for it that no Scot will acknowledge any other ruler."

"I will first eat my own sword," cried Kirkpatrick.

At this moment the portcullis of the gate was raised, and Maxwell falling back to make way for the regent, Wallace had not time to answer a sentiment now so familiar to him by hearing it from every grateful heart that he hardly remarked its tendency.

Ever pressing towards establishing the happiness of his country, he hastened over the splendid repast prepared for him, and dispensing with ceremonials, he retired with Graham to write despatches, and to apportion shares of the spoil to the necessities of the provinces.

CHAPTER XLIII.

LAMMINGTON.

DAY succeeded day in the execution of these beneficial designs. While he was thus employed, raising with the quickness of magic the lately-ruined hamlets into well-built villages—while

all the lowlands breathed of comfort and abundance—he felt like the father of a large family, in the midst of a happy and vast home, where every eye turned on him with gratitude.

He had hardly gone the circuit of these valleys, when an embassy from England overtook him at the tower of Lammington. The ambassadors were Edmund, Earl of Arundel (a nobleman who had married the only sister of De Warenne), and Anthony Beck, Bishop of Durham.

At the moment their splendid cavalcade, escorted by a party from Sir Eustace Maxwell, entered the gate of Lammington, Wallace was in hourly expectation of Edwin, and hearing the trampling of horses, he hastened into the courtyard, attended by Gregory's grandchildren. One was in his arms, two others held by his plaid, and a third played with the sword he had unbuckled from his side. It was a clear frosty day, and the keenness of the air brightened the complexion of Wallace, while it deepened the roses of his infant companions. The leader of the Scottish escort immediately proclaimed to the ambassadors that this was the regent. At the sight of so uncourtly a scene the haughty prelate of Durham drew back.

"This man will not understand his own interest," said he, in a disdainful whisper to Lord Arundel.

"I am inclined to think his estimation of it will be beyond ours." As the earl made this reply, the officer of Maxwell informed Wallace of the names and errand of the strangers. At the mention of a Southron, the elder children ran screaming into the house, leaving the youngest, who continued on the breast of Wallace.

The bishop drew near.

"Sir William Wallace," cried the prelate, in a tone whose lordly pitch lowered when his surprised eye saw the princely dignity which shone over the man whose domestic appearance had excited his contempt: "we come from the King of England with a message for your private ear."

"And I hope, gallant chief," joined Lord Arundel, "what we have to impart will give peace to both nations, and establish in honour the most generous as well as the bravest of enemies."

Wallace bowed to the earl's compliment (he knew by his title he must be the brother of De Warenne), and resigning the child into the arms of Graham, he conducted the Southron lords into the hall.

Lord Arundel, looking around, said, "Are we alone, Sir William?"

"Perfectly," he replied, "and I am ready to receive any proposals for peace which the rights of Scotland will allow her to accept."

The earl drew from his bosom a gold casket, and laying it on a table before him, addressed the regent: "Sir William Wallace, I come to you not with the denunciation of an implacable liege lord, whom a rash vassal has offended, but in the grace of the most generous of monarchs, anxious to convert a brave insurgent into a loyal friend. My lord the king having heard by letters from my brother-in-law, the Earl de Warenne, of the honourable manner with which you treated the English whom the fate of battle threw into your power, his Majesty, instead of sending over from Flanders a mighty army to overwhelm this rebellious kingdom, has deputed me, even as an ambassador, to reason with the rashness he is ready to pardon. Also with this diadem," continued the earl, drawing a circlet of jewels from the casket, "which my brave sovereign tore from the brows of a Saracen prince on the ramparts of Acre, he sends the assurance of his regard for the heroic virtues of his enemy. And, to these jewels, he commands me to say, he will add a more efficient crown, if Sir William Wallace will awake from this trance of false enthusiasm, and acknowledge, as he is in duty bound to do, *the supremacy of England over this country*. Speak but the word, noblest of Scots," added the earl, "and the Bishop of Durham has orders from the generous Edward immediately to anoint you King of Scotland;—that done, my royal master will support you in your throne against every man who may dare to dispute your authority."

Wallace rose from his seat. "My lord," said he, "since I took up arms for injured Scotland, I have been used to look into the hearts of men; I therefore estimate with every due respect the compliment which this message of your king pays to my virtues. Had he thought that I deserved the confidence of Scotland he would not have insulted me with offering a price for my allegiance. To be even a crowned vassal of King Edward is far beneath my ambition. Take back the Saracen's diadem; it shall never dishonour the brows of him who has sworn by the Cross to maintain the independence of Scotland, or to lay down his life in the struggle!"

"Weigh well the consequences of this answer," resumed the

earl. "Edward will soon be in England; he will march hither himself with countless legions; and when he falls upon any country in indignation, the places of its cities are known no more."

"Better for a brave people so to perish," replied Wallace, "than to exist in dishonour."

"What dishonour, noble Scot, can accrue from acknowledging the supremacy of your liege lord? or to what can the proudest ambition in Scotland extend beyond that of possessing its throne?"

"I am not such a slave," cried Wallace, "as to prefer what men might call aggrandizement before the higher destiny of preserving to my country its independence. You talk of noble minds, earl; look into your own, and will it not tell you that in the moment a people bring themselves to put the command of their actions, and with that their consciences, into the hands of a usurper (and that Edward is one in Scotland our annals and his tyrannies declare), they sell their birthright, and become unworthy the name of men. In that deed they abjure the gift with which God has entrusted them; and, justly, the angels of his host depart from them. You know the sacred axiom—*Virtue is better than life!* By that we are commanded to preserve the one at the expense of the other; and we are ready to obey. Neither the threats nor the blandishments of Edward have power to shake the resolves of those who 'draw the sword of the Lord and of Gideon!'"

"Rebellious man!" exclaimed Beck, who had listened impatiently, and whose haughty spirit could ill brook such towering language; "since you dare quote Scripture to sanction crime, hear my embassy. To meet the possibility of this flagitious obstinacy, I came armed with the thunder of the Church, and the indignation of a justly incensed monarch. Accept his most gracious offers, delivered to you by the Earl of Arundel. Here is the cross, to receive your oath of fealty," cried he, stretching it forth, as if he thought his commands were irresistible; "but beware! keep it with a truer faith than did the traitor Baliol, or expect the malediction of heaven—the exterminating vengeance of your liege lord!"

Wallace was not discomposed by this attack from the stormy prelate; "My Lord of Durham," replied he, with his usual tranquil air, "had your sovereign sent me such proposals as became a just king, and were possible for an honest Scot to

admit, he should have found me ready to have treated him with the respect due to his rank and honour ; but when he demands the sacrifice of my integrity, were I to consider the glosing language of his embassy as grace and nobleness, I should belie my own truth, which tramples alike on his menaces and his pretended claims. And I ask you, is he a god greater than Jehovah that I should fear him ? ”

“ And durst thou presume,” exclaimed Beck, “ that the light of Israel deigns to shine on a barbarian nation in arms against a hero of the Cross ? Reprobate that thou art, answer to thine own condemnation ! Does not the Church declare the claims of Edward to be just ! and who dares gainsay her decrees ? ”

“ The voice of Him you pretend to serve ! He is no respecter of persons ; He raises the poor from the dust, and by His arm the tyrant and his host are plunged into the whelming waves ! Bishop, I know in Whom I trust. Neither anathema nor armed thousands shall make me acknowledge the supremacy of Edward. He may conquer the body, but the soul of a patriot he can never subdue.”

“ Then,” cried Beck, suddenly rising, black with choler, and stretching his crozier over the head of Wallace, “ as the rod of Moses shed plagues, miseries, and death over the land of Egypt, I invoke the like judgments to fall on this rebellious land, on its blasphemous leader ! And thus I leave it my curse.”

Wallace smiled as the terrific words fell from the lips of this demon in sacred guise. Lord Arundel observed him. “ You despise this malediction, Sir William Wallace ! I thought more piety had dwelt with so much military nobleness ! ”

“ I should not regard the curses of a congregated world,” replied Wallace, “ when my conscience as loudly proclaims that God is on my side. Shall I shrink when I know that I hold His commission ? Did the clouds rain fire, and the earth open beneath me, I would not stir, for I know who planted me here ; and as long as He wills me to stand, neither men nor devils can move me hence.”

“ Thou art incorrigible ! ” cried Beck.

“ I would say firm,” rejoined Arundel, overawed by the majesty of virtue, “ could I regard, as he does, the cause he has espoused. But, as it is, noble Wallace,” continued he, “ I must regret your infatuation ; and instead of the peace I

thought to leave with you, hurl war, never-ending, extirpating war, upon the head of this devoted nation ! ” As he spoke, he threw his lance* against the opposite wall, in which it stuck and stood shivering ; then taking up the casket, with its splendid contents, he replaced it in his bosom.

Beck had turned away in wrath from the table, and advancing with a magisterial step to the door, he threw it open, as if he thought that longer to breathe the same air with the person he had excommunicated would infect him with his own curses. On opening the door, a group of Scots, who waited in the antechamber, hastened forward. At the sight of the prelate they raised their bonnets, and hesitated to pass. He stood on the threshold, proudly neglectful of their respect. In the next minute, Wallace appeared with Lord Arundel.

“ Brave knight,” said the earl, “ the adieus of a man, as sensible of your private worth as he regrets the errors of your public opinions, abide with you.”

“ Were Edward sensible to virtue, like his brave subjects,” replied the chief, “ I should not fear that another drop of blood need be shed in Scotland to convince him of his present injustice. Farewell, noble earl : the generous candour of yourself and of your brother-in-law will ever live in the remembrance of Wallace.”

While he yet spoke a youth broke from the group before them, and rushing towards the regent, threw himself with a cry of joy at his feet. “ My Edwin, my brother ! ” exclaimed Wallace ; and immediately raising him, clasped him in his arms. The throng of Scots who had accompanied their young leader from Stirling, now crowded about the chief ; some kneeling and kissing his garments, others ejaculating their thanks at seeing their protector in safety, and with redoubled glory.

“ You forgive me, my master and friend ? ” cried Edwin, forgetting, in the happy agitation of his mind, the presence of the English ambassadors.

“ It was only as a master I condemned you, my brother ! ” returned Wallace ; “ every proof of your affection must render you dearer to me ; and had it been exerted against an offender not so totally in our power you would not have met my reprimand. But ever remember that the persons of prisoners are inviolable, for they lie on the bosom of mercy ; and who that has honour would take them thence ? ”

* To throw a spear was an ancient mode of denouncing war.

Lord Arundel, who had lingered to observe this scene, now ventured to interrupt it. "May I ask," said he, "if this interesting youth be the brave young Ruthven who distinguished himself at Dumbarton, and who, De Warenne told me, incurred a severe though just sentence from you, in consequence of his attack upon one whom, as a soldier, I blush to name?"

"It is the same," replied Wallace; "the valour and fidelity of such as he are as sinews to my arms, and bring a more grateful empire to my heart than all the crowns which may be in the power of Edward to bestow."

"I have often seen the homage of the body," said the earl, "but here I see that of the soul; and were I a king I should envy Sir William Wallace!"

"This speech is that of a courtier or a traitor!" suddenly exclaimed Beck, turning with a threatening brow on Lord Arundel. "Beware, earl! for what has now been said must be repeated to the royal Edward, and he will judge whether flattery to this rebel be consistent with your allegiance."

"Every word that has been uttered in this conference,* I will myself deliver to King Edward," replied Lord Arundel; "he shall know the man on whom he may be forced by justice to denounce the sentence of rebellion; and when the puissance of his royal arm lays this kingdom at his feet, the virtues of Sir William Wallace may then find the clemency he now contemns."

Beck did not condescend to listen to the latter part of this explanation, but proceeding to the court-yard, had mounted his horse before his worthier colleague appeared from the hall. Taking a gracious leave of Sir John Graham, who attended him to the door, the earl exclaimed, "What miracle is before me? Not the mighty mover only of this wide insurrection is in the bloom of manhood, but all his generals that I have seen appear in the very morning of youth! And you conquer our veterans; you make yourselves names, which, with us, are only purchased by long experience, and hairs grown grey in camps and battles!"

"Then by our morning judge what our day may be," replied Graham; "and show your monarch that as surely as the night of death will in some hour close upon prince and peasant, this land shall never again be overshadowed by his darkness."

* Wallace's rejection of King Edward's splendid offers is noted by the old British historians, and the substance of his answer particularly recorded.

"Listen not to their bold treason!" cried Beck; and setting spurs to his horse, he galloped out of the gates. Arundel made some courteous reply to Graham, then bowing to the rest of the Scottish officers who stood around, turned his steed, and, followed by his escort, pursued the steps of the bishop along the banks of the Clyde.

When Wallace was left alone with Edwin, the happy youth took from his bosom two packets; one from Lord Mar, the other from the countess. "My dear cousin," said he, "has sent you many blessings; but I could not persuade her to register even one on paper, while my aunt wrote all this. Almost ever since her own recovery, Helen has confined herself to my uncle's sick chamber, now totally deserted by the fair countess, who seems to have forgotten all duties in the adulation of the audience-hall."

Edwin proceeded sportively to describe the regal style which the countess had affected, and the absurd pomp with which she had welcomed the Earls Badenoch and Athol to their native country. "Indeed," continued he, "I cannot guess what vain idea has taken possession of her; but when I went to Snawdoun, to receive her commands for you, I found her seated on a kind of throne, with ladies standing in her presence, and our younger chieftains thronging the gallery, as if she were the regent herself. Helen entered for a moment, but, amazed, started back, never before having witnessed the morning courts of her stepmother."

But Edwin did not relate to his friend all that had passed in the succeeding conference between him and his gentle cousin.

Blushing for her father's wife, Helen would have retired immediately to her own apartments, but Edwin drew her into one of Lady Mar's rooms, and seating her beside him, began to speak of his anticipated meeting with Wallace. He held her hand in his. "My dearest cousin," said he, "will not this tender hand, which has suffered so much for our brave friend, write him one word of kind remembrance? Our queen here will send him volumes."

"Then he would hardly have time to attend to one of mine," replied Helen with a smile. "Besides, he requires no new assurances to convince him that Helen Mar can never cease to remember her benefactor with the most grateful thoughts,"

"And is this all I am to say to him, Helen?"

"All, Edwin."

“What! not one word of the life you have led since he quitted Stirling? Shall I not tell him of the sweet maid who lives here the life of a nun for him? Or must I entertain him with the pomps and vanities of my most unsaintly aunt?”

Helen had in vain attempted to stop him, while with an arch glance at her mantling blushes, he half whispered these insidious questions. “Ah, my sweet cousin, there is something more at the bottom of that beating heart than you will allow your faithful Edwin to peep into.”

She turned on him a steady look. “There is nothing in my heart that you may not see,” she said. “That it reveres Sir William Wallace beyond all other men I do not deny. But class not my veneration with a sentiment which may be jested on! He has spoken to me the language of friendship—you know what it is to be his friend—and having tasted of heaven I cannot stoop to earth. What pleasure can I find in pageants?—what interest in the admiration of men? Is not his esteem of a value that puts to naught the homages of all else in the world? Do me then justice, Edwin! believe me, I am no gloomy recluse. I am happy with my thoughts, and thrice happy at the side of my father’s couch; for there I meet the most exemplary of human beings, there I perform the duties of a child to a parent deserving all my love and honour.”

“Ah, Helen, Helen!” cried Edwin; “dare I speak the wish of my heart! But you and Sir William Wallace would frown on me, and I may not!”

“Then never utter it!” exclaimed Helen, turning pale, and too well guessing by the generous glow in his countenance what would have been that wish.

At that instant the door opened, and Lady Mar appeared. Both rose at her entrance. She bowed coldly to Helen. To Edwin she graciously extended her hand: “Why, my dear nephew, did you not come into the audience-hall?”

Edwin answered smiling, that as he “did not know the governor of Stirling’s lady lived in the state of a queen, he hoped he should be excused for mistaking lords and ladies in waiting for company; and for that reason having retired till he could bid her adieu in a less public scene.”

Lady Mar with much stateliness replied, “Perhaps it is necessary to remind you, Edwin, that I am more than Lord Mar’s wife. I am not only heiress to the sovereignty of the

northern isles, but, like Lord Badenoch, am of the blood of the Scottish kings."

"What!" inquired Edwin, with a playful bow, "does my highness aunt expect my uncle to die, and that Bruce will come hither to lay the crown of Scotland at her feet?"

"I expect nothing of Bruce, nor of your uncle," returned she, with a haughty rearing of her head; "but I look for respect from the daughter of Lord Mar, and from the friend of Sir William Wallace."

She rose from her chair, and presenting Edwin with a packet for Wallace, told Helen she might retire to her own room.

"To my father's I will, madam," returned she.

Lady Mar coloured at this reproof, and turning to Edwin, more gently said, "You know that the dignity of his situation must be maintained, and while others attend his couch I must his reputation."

"I have often heard that 'Fame is better than life!'" replied Edwin, still smiling; "and I thank Lady Mar for showing me how differently people may translate the same lesson. Adieu, dear Helen!" said he, touching her cheek with his lips. "Farewell," returned she, "may good angels guard you!"

The substance of the latter part of this scene Edwin did relate to Wallace. He smiled at the vain follies of the countess, and broke the seal of her letter. It was in the same style with her conversations; at one moment declaring herself his disinterested friend; in the next, uttering wild professions of never-ending attachment. She deplored the sacrifice which had been made of her, when quite a child, to the doting passion of Lord Mar, and complained of his want of sympathy with any of her feelings. Then picturing the happiness which must result from the reciprocal love of congenial hearts, she ventured to show how truly hers would unite with Wallace's. The conclusion of this strange epistle told him that the devoted gratitude of all her relations of the house of Cummin was ready at any moment to relinquish their claims on the crown to place it on brows so worthy to wear it.

The words of this letter were so artfully and so persuasively penned that had not Edwin described the inebriated vanity of Lady Mar, Wallace might have believed that she was ambitious only for him, and that could she share his heart, his throne would be a secondary object. To establish this deception in

his mind, she added, "I live here as at the head of a court, and fools think I take pleasure in it; but did they look into my actions, they would see that I serve while I seem to reign. I am working in the hearts of men for your advancement."

But whether this was her real motive or not, it was the same to Wallace; he felt that she would always be, not merely the last object in his thoughts, but the first in his aversion. Therefore, hastily running over her letter, he recurred to a second perusal of Lord Mar's. In this he found satisfactory details of the success of his dispositions. Lord Lochawe had possessed himself of the western coast of Scotland, from the Mull of Kintyre to the farthest mountains of Glenmore. There the victorious Lord Ruthven had met him, having completed the recovery of the Highlands by a range of conquests from the Spey to the Moray-Frith and Inverness-shire. Lord Bothwell had brought from the shores of Ross and the hills of Caithness every Southron banner which had disgraced their towers.

Graham was sent for by Wallace to hear these pleasant tidings.

"Ah!" cried Edwin in triumph, "not a spot north of the Forth now remains that does not acknowledge the supremacy of the Scottish lion!"

"Nor south of it either!" returned Graham; "from the Mull of Galloway to my gallant father's government on the Tweed; from the Cheviots to the northern ocean, all now is our own. The door is locked against England, and Scotland must prove unfaithful to herself before the Southrons can again set foot on her borders."

The more private accounts were not less gratifying to Wallace; for he found that his plans for disciplining and bringing the people into order were everywhere adopted, and that, in consequence, alarm and penury had given way to peace and abundance. To witness the success of his comprehensive designs, and to settle a dispute between Lord Ruthven and the Earl of Athol relative to the government of Perth, Lord Mar strongly urged him to repair immediately to the scene of controversy.

Well pleased to avoid another rencontre with this lady's love and ambition, Wallace sent off the substance of these despatches to Murray; and next morning, taking a tender leave of the venerable Gregory and his family, with Edwin and Sir John Graham, he set off for the Frith of Forth.

CHAPTER XLIV.

LOCH-AWE.

It was on the Eve of St. Thomas that the boat which contained Wallace drew near to the coast of Fife. A little to the right towered the tremendous precipice of Kinghorn.

"Behold, Edwin," said he, "the cause of all our woe! From those horrible cliffs fell the best of kings, the good Alexander. My father accompanied him in that fatal ride, and was one of the unhappy group who had the evil hap to find his mangled body amongst the rocks below."

"I have heard," observed Graham, "that the sage of Ercildown prophesied this dreadful calamity to Scotland."

"He did prognosticate," replied Wallace, "that on the eighteenth of April a storm should burst over this land which would lay the country in ruins. Fear seized the farmers; but his prophecy regarded a nobler object than their harvests. The day came, rose unclouded, and continued perfectly serene. Lord March, to whom the seer had presaged the event, at noon reproached him with the unlikeliness of its completion. But even at that moment he was ridiculing the sage, a man on a foaming steed arrived at the gate, with tidings that the king had accidentally fallen from the precipice of Kinghorn, and was killed. 'This,' said the lord of Ercildown, 'is the scathing wind and dreadful tempest, which shall long blow calamity and trouble on the realm of Scotland!' And surely his words have been verified, for still the storm rages around our borders—and will not cease, I fear, till the present dragon of England be laid as low as our noble lion was by that mysterious blast."*

The like discourse held the friends till they landed at Roseyth Castle, where they lodged for the night; and next morning, they crossed the Lomonds under a wintry sun, and entered Perth in the midst of a snow-storm.

The regent's arrival soon spread throughout the province, and the hall of the castle was speedily crowded with chieftains, come to pay their respects to their benefactor; while an army of grateful peasantry from the hills filled the suburbs of the town, begging for one glance only of their beloved lord. To oblige them, Wallace mounted his horse, and between the Lords Ruthven and Athol, with his bonnet off, rode from the

* Alexander III. was killed in this manner on the 18th of April, 1290, just seven years before the consequent calamities of his country made it necessary for Wallace to rise in its defence.

castle to the populace-covered plain, which lay to the west of the city. He gratified their affectionate eagerness by this condescension, and received in return the sincere homage of a thousand grateful hearts. The snow-topped Grampians echoed with the proud acclamation of "Our deliverer,"—"Our prince,"—"The champion of Scotland,"—"The glorious William Wallace!" and the shores of Tay resounded with similar rejoicings at sight of him who had made the Scottish seamen lords of the northern ocean.

Ruthven beheld the eloquence of nature with sympathetic feelings. In the midst of war he had planted the fruits of peace; and now the olive and the vine waved abundantly on every hill.

Different were the thoughts of the gloomy Athol as he rode by the side of the regent. Could he by a look have blasted those valiant arms, gladly would he have made Scotland the sacrifice so that he might never again find himself in the triumphant train of one whom he deemed a boy and an upstart!

The issue of Ruthven's claims did not lessen Lord Athol's hatred of the regent. Wallace simply stated the case to him, only changing the situations of the opponents: he supposed Athol to be in the place of Ruthven, and then asked the frowning earl if Ruthven had demanded a government which Athol had bravely won and nobly secured, whether he should deem it just to be sentenced to relinquish it into the hands of his rival? By this question he was forced to decide against himself. But while Wallace hoped that, by having made him his own judge, he had found an expedient to soften the pain of disappointment and to lessen the humiliation of defeat, he had only redoubled the hatred of Athol, who thought he had thus been cajoled out of even the privilege of complaint. He, however, affected to be reconciled to the issue of the affair, and, taking a friendly leave of the regent, retired to Blair; and there, amongst the numerous fortresses which owned his power, he determined to pass his days and nights in devising the sure fall of this proud usurper; for so the bitterness of envy impelled him internally to designate the unpretending Wallace.

Meanwhile the unconscious subject of this hatred, oppressed by the overwhelming crowds constantly assembling to do him homage, retired to Huntingtower—a castle of Lord Ruthven's at some distance from the town. Secluded from the throng, he there arranged with the chiefs of several clans matters of

consequence to the internal repose of the country ; but receiving applications for similar regulations from the counties farther north, he decided on going thither himself. Severe as the weather was at that season, he bade adieu to the warm hospitalities of Huntingtower, and, accompanied by Graham and his young friend Edwin, with a small but faithful train, he commenced a journey which he intended should comprehend the circuit of the Highlands.

With the chieftain of almost every castle in his progress he passed a day, and according to the interest which the situation of the surrounding peasantry created in his mind he lengthened his sojourn. Everywhere he was welcomed with enthusiasm, and his glad eye beheld the festivities of Christmas with a delight which recalled past emotions till they wrung his heart.

The last day of the old year he spent with Lord Loch-awe, in Kilchurn Castle ; and after a bounteous feast, in which lord and vassal joined, according to the custom of the country, the whole family sat up the night to hail the coming in of the new season. Wallace had passed that hour, twelve months ago, alone with his Marion ! They sat together in the window of the eastern tower of Elderslie ; and while he listened to the cheerful lilts to which their servants were dancing, the hand of his lovely bride was clasped in his. Marion smiled, and talked of the happiness which should await them in the year to come. "Ay, my beloved," answered he, "more than thy beauteous self will then fill these happy arms ! Thy babe, my wife, will then hang at thy bosom, to bless with a parent's joys thy grateful husband !" That time was now come round, and where was Marion ?—cold in her grave. Where that smiling babe ?—a murderer's steel had reached it ere it saw the light.

Wallace groaned at these recollections and fled from the room. Rushing far from the joyous tumult, till its sounds died in the breeze, he speeded along the margin of the lake as if he would have flown even from himself. But racking memory followed him. Throwing himself on a bank, over which the ice hung in pointed masses, he felt not the roughness of the ground, for all within him was disturbed and at war.

"Why," cried he, "O ! why was I selected for this cruel sacrifice ? Why was this heart, to whom the acclaim of multitudes could bring no selfish joy—why was it to be bereft of all that ever made it beat with transport ? Companion of my

days, partner of my soul ! my lost, lost Marion ! And are thine eyes for ever closed on me ? Shall I never more clasp that hand which ever thrilled my frame with every sense of rapture ? Gone, gone for ever—and I am alone ! ”

Long and agonising was the pause which succeeded to this tempest of feeling. In that hour of grief he forgot country, friends, and all on earth ! The recollection of his fame was mockery to him ; for where was she to whom the sound of his praises would have given so much joy ?

Again he hastened along the margin of the loch. But there he still heard the distant sound of the pipes from the castle : he could not bear their gay notes, and, darting up the hill which overhung Loch-awe's domains, he ascended the rocky sides of Ben Cruachan. Full of distracting thoughts he hurried from steep to steep, and was rapidly descending the western side of the mountain, regardless of the piercing sleet, when his course was suddenly checked by coming with a violent shock against another human being, who, running as hastily through the storm, had driven impetuously against Wallace, but, being the weaker of the two, was struck to the ground. The accident rallied the scattered senses of the chief.

He raised the fallen man, and asked whether he were hurt. The traveller, perceiving by the kind tone of the inquirer, that no harm had been intended, answered, “ Not much, only a little lamed, and all the recompense I ask for this unlucky upset is to give me a helping hand to my father's cot—it is just by. I have been out at a neighbour's to dance in the new year with a bonnie lass, who, however, may not thank you for my broken shins ! ”

As the honest lad went on telling his tale, with a great many particulars dear to his simple wishes, Wallace helped him along ; and carefully conducting him through the gathering snow, descended the declivity which led to the shepherd's cottage. When within a few yards of it, Wallace heard the sound of singing, but it was not the gay carolling of mirth ; the solemn chant of more serious music, mingled with the roaring blast.

“ I am not too late yet ! ” cried the communicative lad ; “ I should not have run so fast had I not wanted to get home in time enough to make one in the new-year's hymn.”

They had now arrived at the little door, and the youth, without the ceremony of knocking, opened the latch : as he

did so, he turned and said to his companion, "We have no occasion for bolts since Lord Wallace has cleared the country of our Southron robbers." He pushed the door as he spoke and displayed to the eyes of the chief a venerable old man on his knees before a crucifix ; around him knelt a family of young people, and an aged dame, all joining in the sacred thanksgiving. The youth, without a word, dropped on his knees near the door, and making a sign to his companion to do the same, Wallace obeyed ; and as the anthems rose in succession on the ear, he felt the tumult of his bosom gradually subside ; and when the venerable sire clasped his hands in prayer, the natural pathos of his invocations, and the grateful devotions with which the young people gave their response, all tended to tranquillize his mind into a holy calm.

The sacred rites over, two girls ran to the other side of the room, and between them brought forward a rough table covered with dishes and bread, while the mother, taking off a large pot, emptied its smoking contents into the different vessels. Meanwhile the young man, introducing the stranger to his father, related the accident of the meeting, and the good old shepherd, bidding him a hearty welcome, desired him to draw near the fire and partake of their new year's breakfast.

"We need the fire, I assure you," cried the lad, "for we are dripping."

Wallace now advanced from the shadowed part of the room, where he had knelt, and drawing towards the light, certainly displayed to his host the truth of his son's observations. He had left the castle without his bonnet, and hurrying on regardless of the whelming storm, his hair became saturated with wet, and now streamed in water over his shoulders. The good old wife, seeing the stranger's situation was worse than her son's, snatched away the bottle out of which he was swallowing a hearty cordial, and poured it over the exposed head of her guest ; then ordering one of her daughters to rub it dry she took off his plaid, and wringing it, hung it to the fire.

During these various operations, the old man discovered, not so much by the costliness of his garments as by the noble mien and gentle manners of the stranger, that he was some chieftain from the castle. "Your honour," said he, "must pardon the uncourtliness of our ways ; but we give you the best we have, and the worthy Lord Loch-awe cannot do more."

Wallace gave smiling answers to all their remarks and offers

of service. He partook of their broth, praised the good wife's cakes, and sat discoursing with the family with all the gaiety and frankness of one of themselves. He listened with complacency to every legend of witch, fairy, and ghost; and his enlightened remarks sometimes pointed out natural causes for the extraordinary appearances the matron described, or, at better attested and less equivocal accounts of supernatural apparitions, he acknowledged that there are "more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in philosophy."

Morning dawned before the tranquillized Wallace, happy in the cheerful innocence of the scene, discovered that the night was past. As the grey light gleamed through the wooden shutter he arose. "My friends, I must leave you," said he; "there are those not far off who may be alarmed at my disappearance, for none knew when I walked abroad, and unwittingly I have been charmed all these hours to remain, enjoying the happiness of your circle, forgetful of the anxiety I have perhaps occasioned in my own."

The old man declared his intention of seeing him over the hill. Wallace declined giving him that trouble, saying that as it was daylight, and the snow had ceased, he could easily retrace his steps to the castle.

"No, no," returned the shepherd; "and besides," said he, "as I hear the good lord regent is keeping the new year with our noble earl, who knows but I may get a glimpse of his noble countenance, and that will be a sight to tell till I die!"

"God's blessings on his sweet face!" cried the old woman; "but I would give all the yarn in my muckle chest to catch one look of his lucky eye! I warrant you, witch nor fairy could never harm me more!"

"Ah, father," cried the eldest of the girls, blushing, "if you go near enough to him! Do you know, Madgie Grant told me, if I could but get even the least bit of Sir William Wallace's hair, and give it to Donald Cameron to wear in a true lover's knot on his breast, no Southron will be able to do him harm as long as he live!"

"And do you believe it would protect your lover, my pretty Jeannie?" inquired Wallace, with a smile.

"Surely," she replied; "for Madgie is a wise woman, and has the second sight."

"Well, then," returned he, "you shall be gratified. For though I must for once contradict the testimony of a wise

woman, and tell you that nothing can render a man absolutely safe but the protection of heaven ; yet, if a hair from the head of Sir William Wallace would please you, and a glance from his eye gratify your mother, both shall be satisfied," and lifting up the old woman's shears, which lay on a working stool before him, he cut off a golden lock from his head, and put it into the hand of Jeannie. At this action, which was performed with such a noble grace that not one of the family now doubted who had been their guest, the good dame fell on her knees, and Jeannie, with a cry of joy, putting the beautiful lock into her bosom, followed her example, and in a moment all were clinging around him. The old man grasped his hand. "Bravest of men !" cried he, "the Lord has indeed blessed this house, since he has honoured it with the presence of the deliverer of Scotland ! My prayers and the benedictions of all good men, friend or foe, must follow your footsteps !"

Tears of pleasure started into the eyes of Wallace. He raised the family, one by one, from the ground, and putting his purse into the hands of the dame, "There, my kind hostess," said he, "let that fill the chests of your daughters on their bridal day ; they must receive it as a brother's portion to his sisters, for it is with fraternal affection that Sir William Wallace regards the sons and daughters of Scotland."

The happy sobs of the old woman stopped the expressions of her gratitude ; but her son, fearing his freedom of the night before might have offended, stood abashed at a distance. Wallace stretched out his hand to him, "My good Archibald," cried he, "do not hold back from one who will always be your friend. I shall send from the castle this day sufficient to fill your bridal coffers also."

Archibald now petitioned to be allowed to follow him in his army. "No, my brave youth," replied the chief ; "Lord Lochawe will lead you forth whenever there is occasion : and, meanwhile, your duty is to imitate the domestic duties of your worthy father. Make the neighbouring valley smile with the fruits of your industry, and raise a family to bless you as you now bless him."

Wallace, having wrapped himself in his plaid, now withdrew amidst the benedictions of the whole group ; and swiftly recrossing the mountain heights, was soon on the western brow of Ben Cruachan. In ten minutes afterwards he entered the hall of Kilchurn Castle.

Next morning, when the family met at the breakfast-board, they were not a little surprised to hear Wallace recount the adventure of the night ; and while Loch-awe promised every kindness to the shepherd, a messenger was despatched with a purse to Archibald.

The hospitable rites of the season being over, in the course of a few days the earl accompanied his illustrious guest to make the circuit of Argyleshire. At Castle Urquhart they parted ; and Wallace, proceeding with his two friends, performed his legislative visits from sea to sea. Having traversed the whole of the northern parts of the kingdom, he returned to Huntingtower on the very morning that a messenger had reached it from Murray. That vigilant chieftain informed the regent of King Edward's arrival from Flanders, and that he was preparing a large army to march into Scotland.

"We must meet him on his own shores," cried Wallace ; "and so let the horrors attending the seat of war fall on the country whose king would bring desolation to ours."

CHAPTER XLV.

STANMORE.

WORD was despatched from chief to chief, to call the clans of the Highlands to meet their regent by a certain day in Clydesdale. Wallace himself set forward to summon the strength of the lowlands, but at Kinclavin Castle, on the coast of Fife, he was surprised with another embassy from Edward—a herald, accompanied by that Sir Hugh le de Spencer who had conducted himself so insolently on his first embassy.

Entering the chamber where the regent sat with the chiefs who had accompanied him from Perthshire, the two Englishmen walked forward ; but before the herald could pay the customary respects, Le de Spencer advanced to Wallace, and in the pride of a little mind, elated at being empowered to insult with impunity, he broke forth : "Sir William Wallace, the contumely with which the ambassadors of Prince Edward were treated is so resented by the King of England that he invests his own majesty in my person to tell you that your treasons have filled up their measure ! that now, in the plentitude of his continental victories, he descends upon Scotland to annihilate this rebellious nation ; and ——"

"Stop, Sir Hugh le de Spencer," cried the herald, touching

him with his sceptre ; “ whatever may be the denunciations with which our sovereign has entrusted you, you must allow me to perform my duty before you declare them. And thus I utter the gracious message with which his majesty has honoured my mouth.”

He then addressed Wallace ; and in the king’s name, accusing him of rebellion, and of unfair and cruel devastations made in Scotland and in England, promised him pardon for all if he would immediately disband his followers and acknowledge his offence.

Wallace motioned with his hand for his friends to keep silence, and calmly replied to the herald—“ When we were desolate, your king came to us as a comforter, and he put us in chains ! While he was absent, I invaded his country as an open enemy. I rifled your barns, but it was to feed a people whom his robberies had left to perish. I marched through your lands, I made your soldiers fly before me ; but what spot on all your shores have I made black with the smoke of ruin ? I leave the people of Northumberland to judge between me and your monarch. And that he never shall be mine or Scotland’s, with God’s blessing on the right, our deeds shall further prove ! ”

“ Vain and ruinous determination ! ” exclaimed Le de Spencer. “ King Edward comes against you with an army that will reach from sea to sea. Wherever the hoofs of his war-horse strike there grass never grows again. The sword and the fire shall make a desert of this land ; and your arrogant head, proud Scot, shall bleed upon the scaffold ! ”

“ He shall first see my fires, and meet my sword in his own fields,” returned Wallace ; “ and if God continue my life, I will keep my Easter in England, in despite of King Edward, and of all who bear arms in his country ! ”

As he spoke, he rose from his chair, and bowing his head to the herald, the Scottish marshals conducted the ambassadors from his presence. Le de Spencer twice attempted to speak, but the marshals would not allow him. They said that the business of the embassy was now over, and should he presume further to insult their regent, the privilege of his official character should not protect him from the wrath of the Scots. Intimidated by the frowning brows and nervous arms of all around, he held his peace, and the doors were shut on him.

Wallace foresaw the heavy tempest to Scotland threatened

by these repeated embassies. He perceived that Edward, by sending overtures which he knew could not be accepted, meant to throw the blame of the continuation of hostilities upon the Scots, and so overcome the reluctance of his more equitable nobility to further persecute a people whom he had made to suffer so unjustly. The same insidious policy was likewise meant to change the aspect of the Scottish cause in the eyes of Philip of France, who had lately sent congratulations to the regent, on the victory of Cambus-Kenneth, and by that means deprive him of a powerful ally and zealous negotiator for an honourable peace.

To prevent this last injury, Wallace despatched a quick-sailing vessel with Sir Alexander Ramsay, to inform King Philip of the particulars of Edward's proposals, and of the subsequent continued warfare.

On the twenty-eighth of February, Sir William Wallace joined Lord Andrew Murray on Bothwell Moor.

A strong force from the Highlands joined the troops from Stirling, and Wallace had the satisfaction of seeing before him thirty thousand well-appointed men eager for the fight. With all Scotland pressing on his heart, his eye lingered on the towers of Bothwell: but not delaying a moment, he placed himself at the head of his legions, and set forth through a country now budding with all the charms of cultivation he had spread over it. His troops halted for rest near the village of Biggar; and it being night, he ascended to the top of the highest craig, and lit a fire, whose light he hoped would send the news of his approach to Annandale. The air being calm and clear, the signal rose in such a long pyramid of flame, that distant shouts of rejoicing were heard breaking the deep silence of the hour. A moment after, a hundred answering beacons burnt along the horizon. Torthorald saw the propitious blaze; he showed it to his terrified followers. "Behold that *hill of fire*!" cried he, "and cease to despair." "Wallace comes!" was their response; "and *we will do or die*!"*

Day broke upon Wallace as he crossed the heights of Drumlanrig; and pouring his thousands over the almost deserted valleys of Annandale, like a torrent he swept the invaders back upon their steps. He took young Percy prisoner, and

* The mountain from which this beacon sent its rays has from that hour been called *Tinto* or *Tintoc* (which signifies *The Hill of Fire*), and is yet regarded by the country people with a devotion almost idolatrous. Its height is about 2,260 feet from the sea.

leaving him shut up in Lochmaben, drove his flying vassals far beyond the borders.

Annandale again free, he went into its various quarters, and summoning the people, reproved them for their cowardice. "Faith in a leader is good," said he; "but not such a faith as leaves him to act, without yourselves rendering that assistance to your own preservation, which heaven itself commands. When absent from you in person, I left my spirit with you in the brave knights of Carlaverock and Torthorald, and yet you fled. Partake my spirit, brethren of Annandale; fight as stoutly over my grave as by my side, or before the year expires you will again be the slaves of Edward."

Such language awoke emulation in all to efface with honourable deeds the memory of their disgrace. With augmented forces he therefore marched into Cumberland, and having drawn up his array between a river and a high ground, which he covered with archers, he stood prepared to meet the approach of King Edward.

But Edward did not appear till late in the next day, and then the Scots descried his legions advancing from the horizon to pitch their vanguard on the plain of Stanmore. Wallace knew that for the first time he was now going to pitch his soldiership against that of the greatest general in Christendom. But he did not shrink from measuring him arm to arm and mind to mind, for the assurance of his cause was in both.

His present aim was to draw the English towards the Scottish lines, where at certain distances he had dug deep pits, and having covered them lightly with twigs and loose grass, left them as traps for the Southron cavalry; for in cavalry he was told by his spies would consist the chief strength of Edward's army. The waste in which Wallace had laid the adjoining counties rendered the provisioning of so large a host difficult; and, as it was composed of a mixed multitude from every land on which the King of England had set his invading foot, harmony could not be expected to continue amongst its leaders. Delay was therefore an advantage to the Scottish regent, and observing that his enemy held back, as if he wished to draw him from his position, he determined not to stir, although he might seem to be struck with awe of so great an adversary.

To this end he offered him peace, hoping either to obtain what he asked (which he did not deem probable), or, by filling

Edward with an idea of his fear, urge him to precipitate himself forward, to avoid the dangers of a prolonged sojourn in so barren a country, and to take Wallace, as he might think, in his panic. Instructing his heralds what to say, he sent them on to Roycross, near which the tent of the King of England was pitched. Supposing that his enemy was now at his feet, Edward admitted the ambassadors, and bade them deliver their message. Without further parley the herald spoke.

“Thus saith Sir William Wallace. Were it not that the kings and nobles of the realms of Scotland have ever asked redress of injuries before they sought revenge, you, King of England, and invader of our country, should not now behold orators in your camp persuading concord, but an army in battle array, advancing to the onset. Our Lord Regent being of the ancient opinion of his renowned predecessors, that the greatest victories are never of such advantage to a conqueror as an honourable and bloodless peace, sends to offer this to you at the price of restitution. The lives you have rifled from us you cannot restore, but the noble Lord Douglas, whom you now unjustly detain a prisoner, we demand; and that you retract those claims on our monarchy which never had existence till ambition begot them on the basest treachery. Grant these just requisitions and we lay down our arms; but continue to deny them and our nation is ready to rise to a man, and with heart and hand avenge the injuries we have sustained. You have wasted our lands, burnt our towns, and imprisoned our nobility. Without consideration of age or condition, women, children, and feeble old men have unresisting fallen by your sword. And why was all this? Did our confidence in your honour offend you, that you put our chieftains in durance, and deprived our yeomanry of their lives? Did the benedictions with which our prelates hailed you as the arbitrator between our princes raise your ire that you burnt their churches, and slew them on the altars? These, O king, were thy deeds, and for these William Wallace is in arms. But yield us the peace we ask—withdraw from our quarters—relinquish your unjust pretensions, and we shall once more consider Edward of England as the kinsman of Alexander the Third, and his subjects the friends and allies of our realm.”

Not in the least moved by this address, Edward contemptuously answered, “Intoxicated by a transitory success, your leader is vain enough to suppose that he can discomfort the

King of England, as he has done his unworthy officers, by fierce and insolent words ; but we are not so weak as to be overthrown by a breath, nor so base as to bear argument from a rebel. I come to claim my own, to assert my supremacy over Scotland ; and it shall acknowledge its liege lord, or be left a desert, without a living creature to say, ‘ This was a kingdom.’ Depart, this is my answer to you ; your leader shall receive his at the point of my lance.”

Wallace, who did not expect a more favourable reply, ere his ambassadors returned had marshalled his lines for the onset, Lord Bothwell, with Murray, his valiant son, took the lead on the left wing ; Sir Eustace Maxwell and Kirkpatrick commanded on the right. Graham held the reserve behind the woods ; and the regent himself, with Edwin and his brave standard-bearer, occupied the centre. Having heard the report of his messengers, he repeated to his troops the answer they had brought, and exhorted them to remember that on that day the eyes of all Scotland would be upon them. They were the first of their country to meet the tyrant in a pitched battle, and in proportion to the danger they confronted would be their meed of glory. “ But it is not for renown merely that you are called upon to fight this day,” said he ; “ your rights, your homes, are at stake. Slavery and freedom lie before you ! Shrink but one backward step and yourselves are in bondage, your wives become the prey of violence. Be firm—trust Him who blesses the righteous cause, and victory will crown your arms ! ”

Though affecting to despise his opponent, Edward was too good a general really to condemn an enemy who had so often proved himself worthy of respect ; and therefore, by declaring his determination to put all the Scottish chieftains to death, and to transfer their estates to his conquering officers, he stimulated their avarice, as well as love of fame, and with every passion in arms, they rushed to the combat.

Wallace stood unmoved. Not a bow was drawn till the impetuous squadrons, in full charge towards the flanks of the Scots, fell into the pits ; then it was that the Highland archers on the hills launched their arrows : the plunging horses were instantly overwhelmed by others who could not be checked in their career. New showers of darts rained upon them, and made them rear and roll upon their riders ; while others, who were wounded, but had escaped the pits, flew back in rage

of pain upon the advancing infantry. A confusion ensued, so perilous, that the king thought it necessary to precipitate himself forward, and in person attack the main body of his adversary, which yet stood inactive. Giving the spur to his charger, he passed the first range of pits, but a second and a wider awaited him, and there, seeing his men sink into them by squadrons, he beheld the whole army of Wallace close in upon them. Terrific was now the havoc. The very numbers of the Southrons, and the mixed discipline of their army, proved its bane. In the tumult they hardly understood the orders which were given; and some mistaking them, acted so contrary to the intended movements, that Edward, galloping from one end of the field to the other, appeared like a frantic man, regardless of every personal danger, so that he could but fix others to front the same tempest of death with himself. His officers trembled at every step he took for fear that some of the secret pits should engulf him. However, the unshrinking courage of their monarch rallied a part of the distracted army, which, with all the force of desperation, he drove against the centre of the Scots. But at this juncture, the reserve, under Graham, having turned the royal position, charged him in the rear; and the archers redoubling their discharge of artillery, the Flanderskins, who were in the van of Edward, suddenly giving way with cries of terror, the amazed king found himself obliged to retreat, or run the risk of being taken. He gave a signal—the first of the kind he had ever sounded in his life—and drawing his English troops around him, after much hard fighting, fell back in tolerable order beyond the confines of his camp.

The Scots were eager to pursue him, but Wallace checked the motion—"Let us not hunt the lion till he stand at bay!" cried he. "He will retire far enough from the Scottish borders, without our leaving this vantage ground to drive him."

What Wallace said came to pass. Soon no vestige of a Southron soldier, but the dead which strewed the road, was to be seen from side to side of the wide horizon. The royal camp was immediately seized by the triumphant Scots; and the tent of King Edward, with its costly furniture, was sent to Stirling as a trophy of the victory.

CHAPTER XLVI.

STIRLING.

MANY chieftains from the north had drawn to Stirling, to be near intelligence from the borders. They were aware that this meeting between Wallace and Edward must be the crisis of their fate. The few who remained in the citadel, of those who had borne the brunt of the opening of this glorious revolution for their country, were full of sanguine expectations. They had seen the prowess of their leader, they had shared the glory of his destiny, and they reared not that Edward would deprive him of one ray. But they who, at the utmost wilds of the Highlands, had only heard his fame doubted how his fortunes might stand the shock of Edward's happy star. The lords whom he had released from the Southron prisons were all of the same apprehensive opinion, for they knew what numbers Edward could bring against the Scottish power, and how hitherto unrivalled was his skill in the field. "Now," thought Lord Badenoch, "will this brave Scot find the difference between fighting with the officers of a king and a king himself, contending for what he determines shall be a part of his dominions!" Full of this idea, and resolving never to fall into the hands of Edward again, he kept a vessel in readiness at the mouth of the Forth to take him, as soon as the news of the regent's defeat should arrive, far from the sad consequences to a quiet asylum in France.

The meditations of Athol, Buchan, and March were of a different tendency. It was their design, on the earliest intimation of such intelligence, to be the first to throw themselves at the feet of Edward, and acknowledge him their sovereign. Thus, with various projects in their heads, were several hundred expecting chiefs assembled round the Earl of Mar, when Edwin Ruthven rushed into the hall, and, throwing the royal standard of England on the ground, exclaimed, "There lies the supremacy of King Edward!"

Every man started on his feet. "You do not mean," cried Athol, "that King Edward has been beaten?" "He has been beaten, and driven off the field!" returned Edwin. "These despatches will relate every particular. A hard battle our regent fought, but angels were his allies, and Edward himself fled. I saw the king, after he had thrice rallied his troops and brought them to the charge, at last turn and fly.

It was at that moment I wounded his standard-bearer, and seized this dragon."

"Thou art worthy of thy general, Ruthven!" cried Badenoch to Edwin. "James," added he, addressing his eldest son, who had just arrived from France, "what is left to us to show ourselves also of Scottish blood? Heaven has given him all!"

Lord Mar, who had stood in speechless gratitude, opened the despatches, and read them aloud. Their contents excited a variety of emotions. When the nobles heard that Edward had offered Wallace the crown, when they found that by vanquishing that powerful monarch, he had subdued even the soul of the man who had hitherto held them all in awe—though in the same breath they read that their regent had refused royalty, envy, dark as Erebus, passed like electricity from heart to heart. A dead silence reigned, while the demon of hatred was taking possession of almost every breast: and none but the Lords Mar, Badenoch, and Loch-awe escaped the black contagion.

When the meeting broke up Lord Mar placed himself at the head of the officers of the garrison, and with a herald holding the banner of Edward beneath the colours of Scotland, rode forth to proclaim to the country the decisive victory of its regent. Badenoch and Loch-awe left the hall to hasten with the tidings to Snawdown. The rest of the chiefs dispersed. But, as if actuated by one spirit, they were soon wandering about the outskirts of the town, where they soon drew together in groups, and whispered among themselves these and similar statements—"He refused the crown offered to him in the field by the people: he rejected it from Edward, because he would reign uncontrolled. He will now seize it as a conqueror, and we shall have an upstart's foot upon our necks. If we are to be slaves, let us have a tyrant of our own choosing."

Murmurings such as these, passing from chief to chief, descended to the minor chieftains, who held lands in fee of those more sovereign lords. Petty interests extinguished gratitude for general benefits, and a conspiracy, at the head of which were Athol, Buchan, and March, was formed to upset the power of Wallace. They were to invite Edward once more to take possession of the kingdom: and, meanwhile, to accomplish this with certainty, each chief was to assume a pre-eminent zeal for the regent. March was to persuade Wallace to send him to Dunbar as governor of the Lothians, to hold the

refractory Soulis in check, and to divide the public cares of Lord Dundaff, who, indeed, found Berwick a sufficient charge for his age and comparative inactivity. "Then," cried the false Cospatrick,* "when I am fixed at Dunbar, Edward may come round from Newcastle to that port, and by your management, he must march unmolested to Stirling, and seize the usurper on his throne."

They feared to hint a word of their intentions to Lord Badenoch ; for, on Buchan having expressed some discontent to him at the homage that was paid to a man so much their inferior, his answer was—"Had we acted worthy of our birth, Sir William Wallace never could have had the opportunity to rise upon our disgrace, But as it is, we must submit, or bow to treachery instead of virtue." This reply determined them to keep their proceedings secret from him, and also from Lady Mar ; for both Lord Buchan and Lord Athol had, at different times, listened to the fond dreams of her love and ambition. Athol gloomily affected acquiescence that he might render himself master of all that was in her mind, and, perhaps, in that of her lover ; for he did not doubt that Wallace was as guilty as her wishes would have made him. And Buchan, ever ready to yield to the persuasions of woman, was not likely to refuse when his fair cousin promised to reward him with all the pleasures of the gayest court in Europe. For, indeed, both lords had conceived, from the failing state of her veteran husband, that it might not be long before this visionary game would be thrown into her hands.

Lord Badenoch had listened with a different temper to the first breathings of Lady Mar on her favourite subject. "Cousin," said he, "beware how you allow so guilty an idea to take possession of your heart ! And did I think that Sir William Wallace was capable of sharing your wishes I would be the first to abandon his standard. But I believe him too virtuous to look on a married woman with the eyes of passion ; and that he holds the houses of Mar and Cummin in too high a respect to breathe an illicit sigh in the ear of my kinswoman."

Despairing of making the impression she desired on the mind of this severe relative, Lady Mar spoke to him no more on the subject. And Lord Badenoch, ignorant that she had imparted her criminal project to his brother and cousin, believed that

* The name by which Patrick Dunbar, Earl of March, was familiarly called.

his reproof had performed her cure. Thus he made no hesitation to be the first who should go to Snawdoun to communicate to her the brilliant despatches of the regent, and to declare the freedom of Scotland to be now almost secured. He and Lord Loch-awe set forth ; but they had been some time preceded by Edwin.

The moment the countess heard the name of her nephew announced she made a sign for her ladies to withdraw, and starting forward at his entrance, "Speak !" cried she ; "tell me, Edwin, is the regent still a conqueror ?" "Where are my mother and Helen," replied he, "to share my tidings ?" "Then they are good !" exclaimed Lady Mar, with one of her bewitching smiles. "Ah, you sly one ; like your chief, you know your power !" "And, like him, I exercise it," replied he, gaily ; "therefore, to keep your ladyship no longer in suspense, here is a letter from the regent himself." He presented it as he spoke ; and she, catching it from him, turned round, and pressing it rapturously to her lips eagerly ran over its brief contents. While re-perusing it Lady Ruthven and Helen entered the room. The former hastened forward ; the latter trembled as she moved, for she did not yet know the information which her cousin brought. But the first glance of his face told her all was safe : and as he broke from his mother's embrace, to clasp Helen in his arms, she fell upon his neck, and, with a shower of tears, whispered, "Wallace lives ? Is well ?" "As you would wish him," re-whispered he, "and with Edward at his feet." "Thank God, thank God !" While she spoke, Lady Ruthven exclaimed—"But how is our regent ? Speak, Edwin ! How is the delight of all hearts ?" "Still the lord of Scotland," answered he ; "the invincible dictator of her enemies ! The puissant Edward has acknowledged the power of Sir William Wallace, and after being beaten on the plain of Stanmore, is now making the best of his way towards his own capital."

Lady Mar again and again pressed the cold letter of Wallace to her bosom. "The regent does not mention these matters in his letter to me," said she, casting an exulting glance over the face of Helen. But Helen did not notice it ; she was listening to Edwin, who related every particular that had befallen Wallace from the time of his rejoining him to that very moment. The countess heard all with complacency till he mentioned the issue of the conference with Edward's first

ambassadors. "Fool!" exclaimed she to herself, "to throw away the golden opportunity that may never return!" Not observing her disturbance, Edwin went on with his narrative, every word of which spread the eloquent countenance of Helen with admiration and joy.

Since her heroic heart had wrung from it all selfish wishes with regard to Wallace, she allowed herself to openly rejoice in his success, and to look up unabashed when the glories of his character were brought before her. In such a frame of mind did she listen to the relation of Edwin—did her animated eye welcome the entrance of Badenoch and Loch-awe, and their enthusiastic encomiums on the lord of her heart. Then sounded the trumpet, and the herald's voice in the streets proclaimed the victory of the regent. Lady Mar rushed to the window, as if there she would see himself. Lady Ruthven followed, and as the acclamations of the people echoed through the air, Helen pressed the precious cross of Wallace to her bosom and hastily left the room to enjoy the rapture of her thoughts in the blessed retirement of her own oratory.

In the course of a few days it was announced that the regent was on his return to Stirling. Lady Mar was not so inebriated with her vain hopes as to forget that Helen might traverse the dearest of them should she again present herself to its object. She therefore hastened to her when the time of his expected arrival drew near, and putting on all the matron, affected to give her the counsel of a mother.

CHAPTER XLVII.

STIRLING AND SNAWDOWN.

THE few chieftains who had remained on their estates during the suspense before the battle, now came with numerous trains to greet the return of their victorious regent. The ladies brought forth their most splendid apparel, and the houses of Stirling were hung with tapestry to hail with due respect the benefactor of the land.

At last the hour arrived when a messenger, sent out for the purpose, returned with information that the regent was passing the Carron. At these tidings the animated old earl called out his retinue, mounted his steed, and ordered a charger to be caparisoned with housings wrought in gold to meet Wallace and to bring him into the city. Edwin led it forward. In the rear

of the Earls Mar and Badenoch came all the chieftains of the country in gallant array. Their ladies, on splendid palfreys, followed the superb car of the Countess of Mar ; and, preceding the multitudes of Stirling, left the town a desert. Not a living being seemed now within its walls excepting the Southron prisoners, who had assembled on the top of the citadel to view the return of their conqueror.

Helen remained in Snawdown, believing that she was the only soul left in that vast palace. She sat musing on the extraordinary fate of Wallace—a few months ago a despised outlaw, at this moment the idol of the nation ! And then turned to herself—the wooed of many a gallant heart, and now devoted to one, whom, like the sun, she must ever contemplate with admiration, while he should pass on above her sphere, unconscious of the devotion which filled her soul.

The distant murmur of the populace thronging out of the streets towards the Carse gradually subsided, and at last she was left in profound silence. “He must be near,” thought she ; “he whose smile is more precious to me than the adulation of all the world besides, now smiles upon every one ! All look upon him, all hear him, but I—and I—Ah, Wallace, did Marion love thee dearer ? ” As her devoted heart demanded this question, she hid her face in her hands. A pause of a few minutes—and a sound as if the skies were rent tore the air ; a noise like the distant roar of the sea succeeded, and soon after the shouts of an approaching multitude shook the palace to its foundations. Helen started on her feet ; the tumult of voices augmented ; the sound of coming squadrons thundered over the ground. At this instant every bell in the city began its peals, and the door of Helen’s room suddenly opened—Lady Ruthven hurried in. “Helen,” cried she, “I would not disturb you before ; but as you were to be absent I would not make one in Lady Mar’s train, and I come to enjoy with you the return of our beloved regent ! ”

Helen did not speak, but her eloquent countenance amply told her aunt what were the emotions of her heart ; and Lady Ruthven taking her hand, attempted to draw her toward an oriel window which opened to a view of the High Street, but Helen, shrinking from the movement, begged to be excused. “I hear enough,” said she ; “my dear aunt, sights like these overcome me ; let me remain where I am.”

Lady Ruthven was going to remonstrate, when the loud

huzzas of the people and soldiers struck Helen back into her seat, and Lady Ruthven darting towards the window, cried aloud, "He comes, Helen, he comes! His bonnet off his noble brow. Oh! how princely does he look—and now he bows. Ah, they shower flowers upon him from the houses on each side of the street; how sweetly he smiles and bows to the ladies as they lean from their windows. Come, Helen, come, if you would see the perfection of majesty and modesty united in one." Helen did not move; but Lady Ruthven, stretching out her arm, in a moment had drawn her within view of Wallace. She saw him attended as a conqueror and a king, but with the eyes of a benefactor and a brother he looked on all around. Helen drew a quick sigh, and closing her eyes, dropped against the arras. She heard the buzz of many voices, the rolling peal of acclamations, but she distinguished nothing; her senses were in tumults, and had not Lady Ruthven seen her disorder she would have fallen motionless to the floor. The good matron was not so forgetful of the feelings of a virtuous youthful heart not to have discovered something of what was passing in that of her niece. From the moment in which she had suspected that Wallace had made a serious impression there, she dropped all trifling with his name. And now she took the fainting Helen in her arms, and laying her on a couch, by the aid of volatiles, restored her to recollection. She made no observation on this emotion, and Helen leaned her head and wept upon the bosom of her aunt. Lady Ruthven's tears silently mingled with hers, but she said within herself, "Wallace cannot be always insensible to so much excellence!"

As the acclaiming populace passed the palace in their way to the citadel, Helen remained quiet in her leaning position; but when the noise died away into hoarse murmurs, she raised her head, and glancing on the tear-bathed face of her affectionate aunt, said, with a forced smile, "My more than mother, fear me not! I am grateful to Sir William Wallace; I venerate him as the Southrons do their St. George, but I need not your tender pity." As she spoke her beautiful lip quivered, but her voice was steady. "My sweetest Helen," replied Lady Ruthven, "how can I pity her for whom I hope everything?" "Hope nothing for me," returned Helen, understanding by her looks what her tongue had left unsaid, "but to see me a vestal here, and a saint in heaven." "What can my Helen mean?" replied Lady Ruthven; "who would talk of being a

vestal with such a heart in view as that of the regent of Scotland ? And that it will be yours does not his eloquent gratitude declare ? ” “ No, my aunt,” answered Helen, “ gratitude is eloquent where love would be silent. I am not so sacrilegious as to wish that Sir William Wallace should transfer that heart to me which the blood of Marion for ever purchased. No ; should these people compel him to be their king, I will retire to some monastery, and for ever devote myself to God and to prayers for my country.”

The holy composure which spread over the countenance of Helen as she uttered this, seemed to extend itself to the mind of Lady Ruthven ; she pressed her tenderly in her arms, and kissing her : “ Gentlest of human beings ! ” cried she, “ whatever be thy lot it must be happy.” “ Whatever it be,” answered Helen, “ I know that there is an Almighty reason for it ; I shall understand it in the world to come, and I cheerfully acquiesce in this.” “ Oh ! that Wallace could hear thee ! ” cried Lady Ruthven. “ He will some time,” she answered, with an angelic smile. “ When ? where, dearest ? ” asked Lady Ruthven, hoping that she began to have fairer anticipations for herself. Helen answered not ; but pointing to the sky, rose from her seat with an air as if she were really going to ascend to those regions which seemed best fitted to receive her pure spirit. Lady Ruthven gazed on her in speechless admiration ; and without a word or an impeding motion, felt Helen softly kiss her hand, and with another seraphic smile, glide gently from her into her closet, and close the door.

Far different were the emotions which agitated the bosoms of every person present at the entry of Sir William Wallace. All but himself regarded it as the triumph of the king of Scotland. And while some of the nobles exulted in their future monarch, the major part felt the demon of envy so possess their souls, that they who, before his arrival, were ready to worship his name, now looked on the empire to which he seemed borne on the hearts of the people, with a rancorous jealousy, which from that moment vowed his humiliation or the fall of Scotland.

Those ladies who had not retired from the cavalcade to hail their regent a second time from their windows, preceded him in Lady Mar’s train to the hall, where she had caused a sumptuous feast to be spread to greet his arrival. Two seats were placed under a canopy of cloth of gold at the head of the

board. The countess stood there in all the splendour of her ideal rank, and would have seated Wallace in the royal chair on her right hand, but he drew back. "I am only a guest in this citadel," returned he, "and it would ill become me to take the place of the master of the banquet." As he spoke he looked on Lord Mar, who, without a word, took the kingly seat, and so disappointed the countess. By this refusal she still found herself as no more than the governor of Stirling's wife, when she had hoped a compliance with her cunning arrangement would have hinted to all that she was to be the future queen of their acknowledged sovereign. They who knew Wallace saw his unshaken resolution in this apparently slight action; but others translated it differently, and deemed it only an artful rejection of the appendages of royalty, to excite the impatience of the people to crown him in reality.

As the ladies took their seats at the board, Edwin, who stood by the chair of his beloved lord, whispered, "Our Helen is not here."

Lady Mar overheard the name of Helen, but she could not distinguish Wallace's reply; and fearing that some second assignation of more happy termination than that of the chapel might be designed, she determined if Edwin were to be the bearer of a secret correspondence between the man she loved and the daughter she hated, to deprive them speedily of so ready an assistant.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

BANKS OF THE FORTH.

IN the collected council of the following day, the Earl of March made his treacherous request; and Wallace, trusting his vehement oaths of fidelity, granted him charge of the Lothians. The Lords Athol and Buchan were not backward in offering their services to the regent; and the rest of the discontented nobles, following the base example, with equal deceit bade him command their lives and fortunes. While asseverations of loyalty filled the walls of the council-hall, and the rejoicings of the people still sounded from without, all spoke of security and confidence to Wallace; and never, perhaps, did he think himself so absolute in the heart of Scotland as at the very moment when three-fourths of his nobility were plotting his destruction.

Lord Loch-awe knew his own influence in the minds of the

bravest chieftains, and previous to the regent's appearance in the council-hall he opened his intentions to the assembled lords. Some assented with real satisfaction; the rest readily acquiesced in what they had laid so sure a plan to circumvent.

Wallace soon after entered. Loch-awe rising, stood forth before him; and in a long and persuasive speech, once more declared the wishes of the nation, that he would strike the decisive blow on the pretensions of Edward, by himself accepting the crown. The Bishop of Dunkeld, with all the eloquence of learning, and the most animated devotion to the interest of Scotland, seconded the petition. Mar and Bothwell enforced it. The disaffected lords thought proper to throw in their conjurations also; and every voice, but that of Badenoch, poured forth fervent entreaties, that he would grant the supplication of the nation.

Wallace rose, and every tongue was mute. "My gratitude to Scotland increases with my life; but my answer must still be the same—I cannot be its king."

At these words the venerable Loch-awe threw himself on his knees before him. "In my person," cried he, "see Scotland at your feet! She has no more arguments to utter—these are her prayers and thus I offer them."

"Kneel not to me, Loch-awe!" cried Wallace; "nor believe the might of these victories lies so thoroughly in this arm, that I dare outrage its Maker. Were I to comply with your wishes, I should disobey Him who has hitherto made me His happy agent; and how could I guard my kingdom from His vengeance? Your rightful king yet lives; he is an alien from his country, but heaven may return him to your prayers. Meanwhile, as his representative, I shall be blessed in wearing out my life. My ancestors were ever faithful to the blood of Alexander, and in the same fidelity I will die."

The firmness with which he spoke, and the determined expression of his countenance, convinced Loch-awe that he was not to be shaken; and rising from his knee, he bowed in silence. March whispered to Buchan, "Behold the hypocrite! He thinks to blind us to his towering ambition by this affected moderation. He will not be called a king, because with our crown certain limitations are laid on the prerogative; but he will be our regent, that he may be our dictator, and every day demand gratitude for voluntary services, which, performed as a king, could only be considered as his duty!"

When the council broke up these sentiments were actively disseminated amongst the disaffected throng. But every lip in the country at large breathed the name of Wallace as they would have done a god's ; while the land that he had blessed bloomed on every hill and valley like a garden.

The wives and families of the Lanark veterans were brought from Loch Doine, and again planted in their native valleys ; thus, naught in the kingdom appeared different from its prosperous days but the widowed heart of the dispenser of all this good. And yet, so fully did he engage himself in the creation of these benefits, that no time seemed left to him for regrets ; but they haunted him like persecuting spirits, invisible to all but himself.

During the performance of these things, the Countess of Mar was absorbed in the one great object of her passion. Eager to be rid of so dangerous a spy and adversary as she deemed Edwin to be, she was labouring day and night to effect by clandestine schemes his banishment, when an unforeseen circumstance carried him far away. Lord Ruthven, while on an embassy to the Hebrides, fell ill. As his disorder was attended with extreme danger, he sent for his wife ; and Edwin left the side of his friend to accompany her to the isles. Lady Mar had now no scrutinising eye to fear ; her nephew Murray was still on duty in Clydesdale ; her husband trusted her too implicitly even to turn on her a suspicious look ; and Helen, she contrived, should be as little in her presence as possible.

Busy as this lady was, the enemies of the regent were not less active in the prosecution of their plans. The Earl of March had arrived at Dunbar, and having dispatched his treasonable proposals to Edward, had received letters from that monarch by sea, accepting his services, and promising every reward that could satisfy his ambition, and the cupidity of those whom he could draw over to his cause. The wary king then told the earl that if he would send his wife and family to London, as hostages for his faith, he was ready to bring a mighty army to Dunbar, and, by that gate, once more enter Scotland. These negotiations backwards and forwards from London to Dunbar, and from Dunbar to the treacherous lords at Stirling, occupied much time ; and the more, as great precaution was necessary to escape the vigilant eyes of Wallace, which seemed to be present in every part of the kingdom at once. So careful was he in overlooking, by well-chosen officers, civil

and military, every transaction, the slightest dereliction from the straight order of things was immediately seen and examined into. Many of these trusty magistrates having been placed in the Lothians before March took the government, he could not now remove them without exciting suspicion ; and therefore, as they remained, great circumspection was used to elude their watchfulness.

From the time that Edward had again entered into terms with the Scottish chiefs, Lord March sent regular tidings to Lord Soulis of the progress of their negotiation. He knew that nobleman would gladly welcome the recall of the King of England ; for ever since the revolution in favour of Scotland he had remained obstinately shut up within his castle of Hermitage. Chagrin at having lost Helen was not the least of his mortifications ; the wounds he had received from the invisible hand which had released her were not even now healed : their smart made his vengeance burn the fiercer against Wallace, who he now learned was the mysterious agent of her rescue.

While treason secretly prepared to spring its mine beneath the feet of the regent, he thought of no enemy to the tranquil fulfilment of his duties, but the minor persecutions of Lady Mar. No day escaped without bringing him letters, either to invite him to Snawdoun or to lead her to the citadel, where he resided.

Things were in this situation when Wallace, one night, received a hasty summons from Lord Mar, requesting him to immediately repair to his chamber. Concluding that something alarming must have happened, he threw on his brigandine and plaid, and entered the apartments of the governor. Mar met him with a countenance, the herald of a dreadful matter. "What has happened ?" inquired Wallace. "Treason," answered Mar ; "but from what point I cannot guess. My daughter has braved a dark and lonely walk from Snawdoun to bring the proofs. While speaking he led the chief into the room where Helen sat like some fair spectre of the night, her long hair, disordered by the winds of a nocturnal storm, mingling with the grey folds of the mantle which enveloped her. Wallace hastened forward. He had once attempted to express his grateful regrets for what she had suffered for his sake, but the countess had then interrupted him, and Helen disappeared. Now he beheld her in a presence, where he could declare all his grati-

tude without subjecting its gentle object to one harsh word in consequence, and almost forgetting his errand to the governor, and the tidings he had just heard, he remembered only the manner in which she had shielded his life with her arms, and he bent his knee respectfully before her as she rose to his approach. Blushing and silent, she extended her hand to him to rise. He pressed it warmly. "I am happy in this opportunity," said he, "however gained, to pour out my acknowledgments to you; and though I have been denied that pleasure until now, yet the memory of your generous interest in the friend of your father is one of the most cherished sentiments of my heart."

"It is my happiness, as well as my duty, Sir William Wallace," replied she, "to regard you and my country as one; and that, I hope, will excuse the, perhaps, rash action of this night." As she spoke, he rose and looked at Lord Mar for explanation.

The earl held a roll of vellum towards him. "This writing," said he, "was found this evening by my daughter. She was enjoying with my wife and other ladies a moonlight walk on the shores of the Forth behind the palace, when, having strayed at some distance from her friends, she saw this packet lying in the path before her, as if it had been just dropped. It bore no direction; she therefore opened it, and part of the contents soon told her she must conceal the whole till she could reveal them to me. Not even to my wife did she entrust the dangerous secret, nor would she run any risk by sending it by a messenger. As soon as the family were gone to rest, she wrapped herself in her plaid, and finding a passage through one of the low embrasures of Snawdown, made her way to me. She gave me the packet. Read it, my friend, and judge if we do not owe ourselves to heaven for so critical a discovery."

Wallace took the scroll, and read as follows:—

"Our trusty fellows will bring you this, and deliver copies of the same to the rest. We shall be with you in four-and-twenty hours after it arrives. The army of our liege lord is now in the Lothians, passing through them under the appellation of succour for the regent from the Hebrides! Keep all safe, and neither himself nor any of his adherents shall have a head on their shoulders by this day week."

Neither superscription, name, nor date, was to this letter;

but Wallace immediately knew the handwriting to be that of Lord March. "Then we must have traitors, even within these walls," exclaimed Mar; "none but the most powerful chiefs would the proud Cospatrick admit into his conspiracies. And what are we to do? for by to-morrow's evening the army this traitor has let into the heart of the country will be at our gates!"

"No," cried Wallace, "Thanks to God and this guardian angel!" fervently clasping Helen's hand as he spoke; "we must not be intimidated by treachery! Let us but be faithful to ourselves, and all will go well. It matters not who the other traitors are; they must soon discover themselves, and shall find us prepared to counteract their machinations. Sound your bugles, my lord, to summon the heads of our council."

At this command Helen arose, but replaced herself in her chair on Wallace exclaiming, "Stay, Lady Helen, let the sight of such virgin delicacy, braving the terrors of the night to warn betrayed Scotland, nerve every heart with redoubled courage to breast this insidious foe!" Helen did indeed feel her soul awake to all its ancient patriotic enthusiasm; and thus, with a countenance pale, but resplendent with the light of her thoughts, she sat the angel of her heroic inspiration.

The Lords Bothwell, Loch-awe, and Badenoch were the first that obeyed the call. They started at the sight of Helen, but Wallace in a few words related the cause of her appearance and the portentous letter was laid before them. All were acquainted with the handwriting of Lord March, and all agreed in attributing to its real motive his late solicitude to obtain the command of the Lothians. "What!" cried Bothwell, "but to open the castle gates to the enemy!"

"And to repel him before he reaches ours," replied Wallace, "I have summoned you! Edward will not make this attempt without tremendous powers. He knows what he risks: his men, his life, and his honour. We must therefore expect a resolution in him adequate to such an enterprise. Lose not then a moment; even to-night, this instant, go out and bring in your followers! I will call up mine from the banks of the Clyde, and be ready to meet him ere he crosses the Carron."

While he gave these orders, other nobles thronged in, and Helen, being severally thanked by them all, became so agitated that, stretching out her hand to Wallace, who was nearest

to her, she softly whispered, "Take me hence." He read in her face the oppression her modesty sustained in such a scene, and with faltering steps she leaned upon his arm as he conducted her to an interior chamber. Overcome by her former fears and the emotions of the last hour, she sank into a chair and burst into tears. Wallace stood near her, and as he looked on her, he thought, "If aught on earth ever resembled the beloved of my soul it is Helen Mar!" And all the tenderness which memory gave to his almost adored wife, and all the grateful complacency with which he regarded Helen, beamed at once from his eyes. She raised her head—she felt that look—it thrilled to her soul. For a moment every former thought seemed lost in the one perception, that he then gazed on her as he had never looked on any woman since his Marion. Was she then beloved!

The impression was evanescent: "No, no!" said she to herself; and waving her hand gently to him with her head bent down, "Leave me, Sir William Wallace. Forgive me—but I am exhausted; my frame is weaker than my mind." She spoke this at intervals, and Wallace respectfully touching the hand she extended, pressed it to his breast. "I obey you, dear Lady Helen, and when next we meet, it will, I hope, be to dispel every fear in that gentle bosom." She bowed her head without looking up, and Wallace left the room.

CHAPTER XLIX.

FALKIRK.

BEFORE the sun rose, every Scot within a few hours' march of Stirling was on the Carse, and Lord Andrew Murray, with his Clydesdale men were already resting on their arms in view of the city walls. The messengers of Wallace had hastened east and west; and noon saw him at the head of thirty thousand men determined to fight or to die for their country.

When the conspiring lords appeared on the Carse, and Mar communicated to them the lately discovered treason, they so well affected surprise at the contents of the scroll, that Wallace might not have suspected their connection with it, had not Lord Athol declared it altogether a forgery of some wanton persons, and then added with bitterness, "To gather an army on such authority is ridiculous." While he spoke, Wallace regarded him with a look which pierced him to the

centre ; and the blood rushing into his guilty heart, for once in his life he trembled before the eye of man. "Whoever be the degenerate Scot to whom this writing is addressed," said Wallace, "his baseness cannot betray us further. The troops in Scotland are ready to meet the enemy : and woe to the man who that day deserts his country !"

Badenoch's eye followed that of Wallace, and his suspicions fixed where the regent's fell. For the honour of his blood he forbore to accuse the earl, but for the same reason he determined to watch his proceedings.

While Athol marshalled his rebellious ranks, some to follow his broad treason in the face of day, and others to lurk behind and delude the council left in Stirling, Wallace led forth his loyal chiefs to take their stations at the heads of their different clans. Sir Alexander Scrymgeour unfurled his golden standard. The Lords Loch-awe and Bothwell, with others, rode on the right of the regent. Lord Andrew Murray, with Sir John Graham, and a bevy of young knights, kept the ground on his left. Wallace looked around ; Edwin was far away, and he felt but half appointed when wanting his youthful sword-bearer. That faithful friend did not even know of the threatened hostility ; for to have intimated to Lord Ruthven a danger he could not assist to repel, would have inflamed his disorder by anxiety, and perhaps hurried him to dissolution.

As the regent moved forward with these private affections checkering his public cares, the clans appeared in the midst of the plain, awaiting their leaders. Each chief advanced to the head of his line, and stood to hear the charge of Wallace.

"Scots," cried he, "treachery has admitted the enemy whom patriotism had driven from our borders ! Be steady in your fidelity to Scotland, and He who hath hitherto protected the just cause will nerve your arms to lay invasion and its base coadjutors again in the dust."

The cheers of anticipated victory burst from the soldiers, mingled with the clangour of their striking shields. Wallace waved his truncheon (round which the plan of his array was wrapped) to the chiefs to fall back towards their legions ; and while some appeared to linger, Athol, armed cap-à-pie, and spurring his roan into the area before the regent, demanded in a haughty tone, "Which of the chiefs now in the field is to lead the vanguard ?"

"The regent of Scotland," replied Wallace, for once asserting the majesty of his station; "and you, Lord Athol, with the Lord Buchan, are to defend your country under the command of the head of your house, the princely Badenoch."

"I stir not from this spot," returned Athol, fiercely striking his lance into its rest, "till I see the honour of my country established in the eyes of the world by a leader worthy of her rank being placed in her vanguard."

"What he says," cried Buchan, "I second." "And in the same spirit, chieftain of Elderslie," exclaimed Lord Bute, "do I offer to Scotland myself and my people. Another must lead the van, or I retire from her standard."

"Speak on!" cried Wallace, more surprised than confounded by this extraordinary attack.

"What these illustrious chiefs have uttered is the voice of us all!" was the general exclamation from a band of warriors who now thronged around the incendiary nobles.

"Your reign is over," rejoined Athol; "the Scottish ranks are no longer to be cajoled by your affected moderation. We see the tyrant in your smile; we feel him in the despotism of your decrees. To be thus ridden by a man of vulgar blood; to present him as the head of our nation to the King of England is beneath the dignity of our country, is an insult to our nobles; and therefore I again demand of you to yield the vanguard to one more worthy of the station. Before God and St. Magdalen I swear," added he, holding his sword up to the heavens, "I will not stir an inch this day towards the enemy unless a Cummin or a Stewart lead our army."

"And is this your resolution also, Lord Bute?" said Wallace, looking on Stewart. "It is," was the reply, "a foe like Edward ought to be met as becomes a great and independent kingdom. We go in the array of an unanimous nation to repel him; not as a band of insurgents, headed by a general who, however brave, was yet drawn from the common ranks of the people. I therefore demand to follow a more illustrious leader to the field."

"The eagles have long enough followed their owl in peacock's feathers," cried Buchan; "and being tired of the game, I, like the rest, soar upward again!"

"Resign that bâton!" cried Athol; "give place to a more honourable leader!" repeated he, supposing that he had intimidated Wallace; but Wallace, raising the visor of his

helmet, which he had closed on his last commands to his generals, looked on Athol with all the majesty of his truly royal soul in his eyes :—" Earl," said he, " the voice of the three estates of Scotland declare me their regent, and God ratified the election by the victories with which He crowned me. If in aught I have betrayed my trust, let the powers that raised me be my accusers. Four pitched battles have I fought and gained for this country. Twice I beat the representatives of King Edward on the plains of Scotland ; and a few months ago I made him fly before me over the fields of Northumberland ! What, then, has befallen me that my arm is to be too short to meet this man ? Has the oil of the Lord, with which the saint of Dunkeld anointed my brows, lost its virtue, that I should shrink before any king in Christendom ? I neither tremble at the name of Edward, nor will I so disgrace my own as to abandon at such a crisis the power with which Scotland has invested me. Whoever chooses to leave the cause of his country, let them go, and so manifest themselves of noble blood ! I remain, and I lead the vanguard !—Scotsmen, to your duty."

As he spoke with a voice of unanswerable command, several chiefs fell back into their ranks. But some made a retrograde motion towards the town. Lord Bute hardly knew what to think, so was he startled by the appeal of the regent, and the noble frankness with which he maintained his rights. He stood frowning as Wallace turned to him, and said, " Do you, my lord, adhere to these violent men ? or am I to consider a chief who, though hostile to me, was generous in his ire, still faithful to Scotland, in spite of his prejudice against her leader ? Will you fight her battles ? "

" I shall never desert them," replied Stewart ; " 'tis truth I seek ; therefore be it to you, Wallace, this day according to your conscience ! " Wallace bowed his head, and presented him the truncheon, round which his line of battle was wrapped. On opening it he found that he was appointed to command the third division, Badenoch and Bothwell to the first and second, and Wallace himself to the vanguard.

When the scouts arrived, they informed the regent that the English army had advanced near to the boundary of Linlithgow, and from the rapidity of their march, must be on the Carron the same evening. On this intelligence, Wallace put his troops to their speed, and before the sun had declined

far towards the west he was within view of Falkirk. But just as he had crossed the Carron, and the Southron banners appeared in sight, Lord Athol, at the head of his rebellious colleagues, rode up to him. Stewart kept his appointed station, and Badenoch, doing the same, ashamed of his brother's disorder, called after him to keep his line. Regardless of all check, the obstinate chief galloped on; and extending his bold accomplices across the path of the regent, demanded of him, on the penalty of his life, "that moment to relinquish his pretensions to the vanguard."

"I am not come here," replied Wallace indignantly, "to betray my country! I know you, Lord Athol: and your conduct and mine will this day prove who is most worthy the confidence of Scotland." "This day," cried Athol, "shall see you lay down the power you have usurped." "It shall see me maintain it to your confusion," replied Wallace; "and were you not surrounded by Scots, of too tried a worth for me to suspect their being influenced by your rebellious example, I would this moment make you feel the arm of justice. But the foe is in sight; do your duty now, sir earl, and for the sake of the house to which you belong even this intemperate conduct shall be forgotten." At this instant, Sir John Graham, hastening forward, exclaimed, "The Southrons are bearing down upon us!" Athol glanced at their distant host; and turning on Wallace, with a sarcastic smile, "My actions," cried he, "shall indeed decide the day!" and striking his spurs furiously into his horse, he rejoined Lord Badenoch's legion.

Edward did indeed advance in most terrible array. Above a hundred thousand men swelled his numerous ranks; and with these were united all from the Lothians and Teviotdale, whom the influence of the faithless March and the vindictive Soulis could bring into the field. With this augmented host, and a determination to conquer or to die, the Southrons marched rapidly forward.

Wallace had drawn himself up on the ascent of the hill of Falkirk, and advantageously planted his archers on a covering eminence, flanked by the legions of Badenoch. Lord Athol, who knew the integrity of his brother, and who cared not in so great a cause (for such his ambition termed it) how he removed an adversary from Edward, and a censor from himself, gave a ridding order to one of his emissaries.

Accordingly, in the moment when the trumpet sounded the charge and the arrows from the hill darkened the air, Badenoch was stabbed through the back to the very heart. Athol had placed himself near to watch his purpose; but in the instant the deed was done, he threw himself on the perpetrator, and wounded him in the same vital part, exclaimed, holding up his dagger, "Behold the weapon that has slain the assassin, hired by Sir William Wallace! Thus it is, that his ambition would rob Scotland of her native princes. Let us fly from his steel to the shield of a king and a hero."

The men had seen their leader fall; they doubted not the words of his brother, and with a shout exclaimed, "Whither you lead we follow!" all at once turned towards him. "Seize the traitor's artillery!" At this command they mounted the hill, and the archers, little expecting an assault from their countrymen, were either instantly cut down, or hurried away prisoners by Athol and Buchan, who now, at the head of the whole division of the Cummins, galloped towards the Southrons; and with loud cries of "Long live King Edward!" threw themselves *en masse* into their arms. The squadrons which followed Stewart, not knowing but they might be hurried into similar desertion, hesitated in the charge he had commanded them to make; and, while thus undecisive, some obeyed in broken ranks, and others lingered. The enemy advanced briskly up, surrounded the division, and on the first onset slew its leader. His faithful Brandanes,* seeing their commander trampled to the earth, fell into confusion; and communicating their dismay to their comrades, the whole division sank under the shock of the Southrons, as if touched by a spell. Meanwhile Bothwell and his legions were fiercely engaged with the Earl of Lincoln amid the swamps of a deep morass. The firm battalion of the vanguard, alone remaining unbroken, stood before the pressing and now victorious thousands of Edward without receding a step. The archers being lost by the treachery of the Cummins, all hope lay on the strength of the spear and sword; and Wallace, standing immovable as the rock of Stirling, saw rank after rank of his dauntless infantry mowed down by the Southron arrows, while, fast as they fell, their comrades closed over them, and still presented the same im-

* *Brandanes* was the distinguishing appellation of the military followers of the lords of Bute.

penetrable front of steady valour against the heavy charges of the enemy's horse. The King of England, indignant at this pause in his conquering onset, accompanied by his natural brother, the valiant Frère de Briagny, and a squadron of resolute knights, in fury threw themselves towards the Scottish pikemen. Wallace descried the jewelled crest of Edward amidst the cloud of battle there, and rushing forward, hand to hand engaged the king. Edward knew his adversary not so much by his snow white plume as by the prowess of his arm. Twice did the heavy claymore of Wallace strike fire from the helmet of the monarch, but at the third stroke the glittering diadem fell in shivers to the ground, and the blood of Edward followed the blow. He reeled, and another stroke would have settled the freedom of Scotland for ever, had not the strong arm of Frère de Briagny passed between Wallace and the king. The combat thickened; blow followed blow; blood gushed at each fall of the sword; and the hacked armour showed in every aperture a grisly wound. A hundred weapons seemed directed against the breast of the regent of Scotland, when, raising his sword with a determined stroke, it cleft the visor and crest of De Briagny, who fell lifeless to the ground. The cry that issued from the Southron troops at this sight again nerved Edward; ordering his reserve to advance, he renewed the attack, and assailing Wallace with fury in his eyes and arms, he tore the earth with the trampling of disappointed vengeance when he found the invincible phalanx still stood firm. "I will reach him yet!" cried he; and turning to De Valence, he commanded that the new artillery should be called into action. On this order a blast of trumpets in the Southron army blew, and the answering war-wolves it had summoned sent forth showers of red hotstones into the midst of the Scottish battalions. At the same moment the English reserve, charging round the hill, attacked them in flank, and accomplished what the fiery torrent had begun. The field was heaped with dead; the brooks which flowed down the heights ran with blood; but no confusion was there—no, not even in the mind of Wallace, though, with amazement and horror, he beheld the saltire of Annandale, the banner of Bruce, leading onward the last exterminating division! Scot now contended with Scot, brother with brother. Those valiant spirits, who had left their country twenty years before to accompany their

chief to the Holy Land, now re-entered Scotland to wound her; to wrest from her her liberties; to make her mourn in ashes that she had been the mother of such matricides. A horrid mingling of tartans with tartans; a tremendous rushing of the flaming artillery, which swept the Scottish ranks like blasting lightning, for a moment seemed to make the reason of their leader stagger. Arrows, winged with fire, flashed through the air, and twice was the horse of Wallace shot under him, and on every side were his closest friends wounded and dispersed. But though the Southron and the Bruce pressed on him in overwhelming numbers, his few remaining ranks obeyed his call, and, with a presence of mind and military skill that was exhaustless, he maintained the fight till darkness parted the combatants. When Edward gave command for his troops to rest till morning, Wallace, with the remnant of his faithful band, slowly recrossed the Carron, that they also might repose till dawn should renew the conflict.

Lonely was the sound of his bugle, as sitting on a fragment of the druidical ruins of Dunipacis, he blew its melancholy blast to summon his chiefs around him. Its penetrating voice pierced the hills, but no answering note came upon his ear. A direful conviction seized upon his heart. But they might have fled far distant! He blushed as the thought crossed him, and hopeless again, dropped the horn which he had raised to blow a second summons. At this instant Scrymgeour, who had gladly heard his commander's bugle, hastened forward.

"What has been the fate of this dismal day?" asked Wallace, looking onward, as if he expected others to come up. "Where are my friends? Where Graham, Badenoch, and Bothwell? Where all, Scrymgeour, that I do not now see?" He rose from his seat at sight of an advancing group. It approached near, and laid the dead body of a warrior down before him. "Thus," cried one of the supporters, in stifled sounds, "has my father proved his love for Scotland!" It was Murray who spoke; it was the Earl of Bothwell that lay a corpse at his feet!

Tears were coursing each other in mute woe down the cheeks of the affectionate son. He could not for some time answer Wallace, but he grasped his hand, and at last rapidly articulated, "Others may have fallen, but not mortally like him."

Life may yet be preserved in some of our brave companions. Leave me, then, to mourn my dead alone ! and seek ye them.'

Wallace saw that filial tenderness yearned for the moment when it might unburden its grief unchecked by observation. He arose, and making a sign to his friends, withdrew towards his men. Having sent a detachment to guard the sacred enclosure of Dunipacis, he dispatched Graham on the dangerous duty of gathering a reinforcement for the morning. Then sending Scrymgeour, with a resolute band across the Carron, to bring in the wounded (for Edward had encamped his army about a mile south of the field of action), he took his lonely course along the northern bank towards a shallow ford, near which he supposed the squadrons of Lord Loch-awe must have fought, and where he hoped to gain accounts of him from some straggling survivor of his clan. When he arrived at a point where the river is narrowest, and winds its dark stream beneath impending heights, he blew the Campbell pibroch ; the notes reverberated from rock to rock, but, unanswered, died away in distant echoes. Still he would not relinquish hope, and pursuing the path, emerged on an open glade. The unobstructed rays of the moon illumined every object. Across the river, at some distance from the bank, a division of the Southron tents whitened the deep shadows of the bordering woods ; and before them, on the blood-stained plain, he thought he descried a solitary warrior. Wallace stopped. The man approached the margin of the stream, and looked towards the Scottish chief. The visor of Wallace being up discovered his heroic countenance bright in the moonbeams, and the majesty of his mien seemed to declare him to the Southron knight to be no other than the regent of Scotland.

"Who art thou ?" cried the warrior, with a voice of command that better became his lips than it was adapted to the man whom he addressed.

"The enemy of England !" cried the chief.

"Thou art Wallace !" was the immediate reply ; "none else dare answer the Lord of Carrick and of Annandale with such haughty boldness."

"Every Scot in this land," returned Wallace, inflamed with an indignation he did not attempt to repress, "would thus answer Bruce, not only in reference to England, but to himself ! to that Bruce, who, not satisfied with having abandoned his people to their enemies, has stolen a fratricide to slay his

brethren in their home ! To have met them on the plain of Stanmore would have been a deed his posterity might have bewailed ; but what shame will be theirs, when they know that he came to ruin his own rights, to stab his people in the very bosom of his country ! I come from gazing on the murdered body of the virtuous Earl of Bothwell ! The Lords Bute and Fyfe, and perhaps Loch-awe, have fallen beneath the Southron sword, and your unnatural arm ; and yet do you demand, what Scot would dare to tell you that he holds the Earl of Carrick and his coadjutors as his most mortal foes ? ”

“ Ambitious man ! Dost thou flatter thyself with the belief that I am to be deceived by thy pompous declamation ? I know the motive of all this pretended patriotism. I am well informed of the aim of all this vaunted prowess ; and I came not to fight the battles of King Edward, but to punish the proud usurper of the rights of Bruce. I have gained my point. My followers slew the Lord of Bothwell ; my followers made the hitherto invincible Sir William Wallace retreat ! I came in the power of my birthright ; and, as your lawful king, I command you, this hour, to lay your rebel sword at my feet. Obey, proud knight, or to-morrow puts you into Edward’s hand ; and, without appeal, you die the death of a traitor.”

“ Unhappy prince,” cried Wallace, now suspecting that Bruce had been deceived ; “ is it over the necks of your most loyal subjects that you would mount your throne ? How have you been mistaken ! How have you strengthened the hands of your enemy, and weakened your own by this day’s action ! The cause is now probably lost for ever ; and from whom are we to date its ruin, but from him to whom the nation looked as to its appointed deliverer ? From him, whose once honoured name will now be regarded with execration ! ”

“ Burden not my name, rash young man,” replied Bruce, “ with the charges belonging to your own mad ambition. Who disturbed the peace in which Scotland reposed after the battle of Dunbar, but William Wallace ? Who raised the country in arms, but William Wallace ? Who stole from me my birthright, and fastened the people’s love on himself, but William Wallace ? Who affected to repel a crown that he might the more certainly fix it on his head, but

William Wallace ? And who dares now taunt me with his errors and mishaps, but the same traitor to his lawful sovereign ? ”

“ Shall I answer thee, Lord of Carrick,” replied Wallace, “ with a similar appeal ? Who, when the Southron tyrant preferred a false claim to the supremacy of this realm, subscribed to the falsehood ; and by that action did all in his power to make a free people slaves ? Who, when the brand of cruelty swept this kingdom from shore to shore, lay indolent in the usurper’s court, and heard of these oppressions without a sigh ? Who brought an army into his own inheritance, to slay his brethren, and to lay it desolate before his mortal foe ? Thy heart will tell thee, Bruce, who is this man ; and if honour yet remain there thou wilt not disbelieve the asseverations of an honest Scot, who proclaims that it was to save them whom thou didst abandon, that he appeared in the armies of Scotland. It was to supply the place of thy desertion that he assumed the rule, with which a grateful people, rescued from bondage, invested him.”

“ Bold chieftain ! ” exclaimed Bruce, “ is it thus you continue to brave your offended prince ? But in pity to your youth—in admiration of a prowess, which would have been godlike had it been exerted for your sovereign and not used to satisfy an ambition wild as it is towering—I would expostulate with you : I would even deign to tell you, that, in granting the supremacy of Edward, the Royal Bruce submits not to the mere wish of a despot, but to the necessity of the times. This is not an era of so great loyalty that any sovereign may venture to contend against such an arm as Edward’s. And would you, a boy in years, a novice in politics—and though brave and till this day successful, would you pretend to prolong a war with the dictator of kingdoms ? Can rational discrimination be united with the valour you possess, and you not perceive the unequal contest between a weak state, deprived of its head, and agitated by intestine commotions, and a mighty nation, conducted by the ablest and most martial monarch of his age ? A man who is not only determined to maintain his pretensions to Scotland, but is master of every resource, either for protracting war or pushing it with vigour. If the love of your country be indeed your motive for perseverance, your obstinacy tends only to lengthen her misery. But if, as I believe is the case, you carry your views to private aggrandisement, reflect on

their probable issue. Should Edward, by a miracle, withdraw his armies, and an intoxicated people elevate their minion to the throne, the lords of Scotland would reject the bold invasion, and with the noble vengeance of insulted greatness, hurl from its height the proud usurper of their rights and mine."

"To usurp any man's rights, and least of all, my king's," replied Wallace, "never came within the range of my thoughts. Though lowly born, Lord Carrick, I am not so base as to require assumption to give me dignity. I saw my country made a garrison of Edward's; I beheld its people outraged in every relation that is dear to man. Who heard their cry? Where was Bruce? Where the nobles of Scotland, that none arose to extinguish her burning villages, to shelter the mother and the child, to rescue purity from violation, to defend the bleeding father and his son? The shrieks of despair resounded through the land, and none appeared! The hand of violence fell on my own house! the wife of my bosom was stabbed to the heart by a magistrate of the usurper! I then drew the sword! I took pity on those who suffered as I had suffered! I espoused their cause, and never will I forsake it till life forsake me. Therefore, that I became the champion of Scotland, Lord of Carrick, blame not my ambition, but rather the supineness of the nobility, and chiefly yourself—you who, uniting personal merit to dignity of descent, had deserted the post, which both nature and circumstance called upon you to occupy! Had the Scots, from the time of Baliol's abdication, possessed such a leader as yourself, by your valour and their union you must have surmounted every difficulty under which we struggle, and have closed the contest with success and honour. If you now start from your guilty delusion, it may not be too late to rescue Scotland from the perils which surround her. Listen to my voice, prince of the blood of Alexander! Forswear the tyrant who has cajoled you to this abandonment of your country, and resolve to be her deliverer. The bravest of the Scots are ready to acknowledge you their lord, to reign as your forefathers did, untrammelled by any foreign yoke. Exchange a base vassalage for freedom and a throne! Awake to yourself, noble Bruce, and behold what it is that I propose. Heaven itself cannot set a more glorious prize before the eyes of virtue or ambition, than to join in one object, the

acquisition of royalty with the maintenance of national independence ! Such is my last appeal to you. For myself, as I am well convinced that the real welfare of my country can never subsist with the sacrifice of her liberties, I am determined, as far as in me lies, to prolong, not her miseries, but her integrity, by preserving her from the contamination of slavery. But, should fate decree her fall, may that power, which knows the vice and horrors which accompany a tyrant's reign, terminate the existence of a people who can no longer preserve their lives but by receiving laws from usurpation ! ”

The truth and gallantry of these sentiments struck the awakened mind of Bruce with the force of conviction. Another auditor was nigh, who also lost not a syllable, “ and the flame was conveyed from the breast of one hero to that of another.”

Lord Carrick secretly repented of all that he had done, but being too proud to acknowledge so much, he briefly answered—“ Wallace, your words have made an impression on me that may one day still more brighten the glory of your fame. Be silent respecting this conference ; be faithful to the principles you have declared, and ere long you shall hear royally of Bruce.” As he spoke he turned away, and was lost among the trees.

Wallace stood for some minutes musing, when, hearing a footstep behind him, he turned round, and beheld a young and graceful form. The youth, after a pause, bowed his head, and exclaimed, “ Pardon this intrusion, bravest of men. I come to offer you my heart, my life ! To wash out the stigma which now dishonours the name of Bruce.”

“ And who are you, noble youth ? ” cried Wallace. “ Surely my prayers are at last answered, and I hear these sentiments from one of Alexander's race ! ”

“ I am, indeed, one of his blood,” replied he ; “ I am Robert Bruce, the eldest son of the Earl of Carrick. I have hastened to you to declare my determination to live for Scotland, or to die for her ; and to follow the arms of Sir William Wallace till he plants my father on the throne of his ancestors.”

“ I take you at your word, brave prince,” replied the regent ; “ and this night shall give you an opportunity to redeem to Scotland what your father's sword has wrested from her.”

CHAPTER L.

CARRON BANKS.

THE troops of King Edward lay overpowered with wine. Elated with victory, they had drunk largely, the royal pavilion setting them the example ; for though Edward was temperate, yet, to flatter his recovered friends, Buchan and Soulis, he had allowed a greater excess that night than he was accustomed to sanction. The banquet over, every knight retired to his tent ; every soldier to his pallet ; and a deep sleep lay upon every man. The king himself, whose many thoughts had long kept waking, now fell into a slumber.

Guards had been placed around the camp, more from military ceremony than an idea of their necessity. The strength of Wallace they believed broken ; and that they should have nothing to do next morning but to chase him into Stirling, and take him there. But the spirit of the regent was not so easily subdued. He ever thought it shameful to despair while it was possible to make a stand. And now, leading his determined followers through the lower grounds of Cumbernauld, he detached half his force, under Mar, to take the Southron camp in the rear, while he should attack the front, and pierce his way to the royal pavilion.

With soundless caution, the battalion of Mar wound round the banks of the Forth to reach the point of its destination ; and Wallace, proceeding with as noiseless a step, gained the hill which overlooked his sleeping enemies. His front ranks, shrouded by branches they had torn from the trees in Torwood, now stood still. Without this precaution, had any eye looked from the Southron line, they must have been perceived ; but now, should a hundred gaze on them, their figures were so blended with the adjoining thickets, they might easily be mistaken for a part of them. As the moon sunk in the horizon, they moved gently down the hill ; and scarcely drawing breath, were within a few paces of the first outpost, when one of the sentinels suddenly exclaimed, " What sound is that ? " " Only the wind amongst the trees," returned his comrade ; " I see their branches waving. Let me sleep ; we may have hot work to-morrow." And the man slept—to wake no more ; for the next instant a Scottish brand was through every Southron heart on the outpost. That done, Wallace threw away his bough, leaped the narrow dyke which lay in

front of the camp, and with Bruce and Graham at the head of a chosen band of brave men, cautiously proceeded onward to reach the pavilion. At the moment he should blow his bugle, the divisions he had left with Lennox and Murray, and the Lord Mar, were to press forward to the same point.

Still all lay in profound repose—and guided by the lamps which burnt around the royal quarters, the dauntless Scot reached the tent. Wallace had already laid his hand upon the curtain that was its entrance, when an armed man with a presented pike, demanded, “Who comes here !” The regent’s answer laid the interrogator’s head at his feet ; but the voice had awakened the ever-watchful king. Perceiving his own danger in the fall of the sentinel, he snatched his sword, and calling aloud on his sleeping train, sprang from his couch. He was immediately surrounded by half a score knights, who started on their feet before Wallace could reach the spot. Short, however, would have been their protection ; they fell before his arm and that of Graham, and left a vacant place, for Edward had disappeared. Graham and his followers, with firebrands in their hands, threw conflagration into all parts of the camp, and with the fearful war-cries of their country, seemed to assail the terrified enemy from every direction. Men, half dressed and unarmed, rushed from their tents upon the pikes of their enemies ; hundreds fell without striking a blow ; and they nearest the outposts betook themselves in scared throngs over the plains of Linlithgow.

The camp was now on fire in every direction ; and putting all to the hazard of one decisive blow, Edward ordered his men to make at once to the point, where, by the light of the flaming tents, he could perceive the waving plumes of Wallace. With his ponderous mace held terribly in the air, the king himself bore down to the shock ; and breaking through the intervening combatants, assaulted the chief. The might of ten thousand souls was then in the arm of the regent of Scotland. The puissant Edward wondered at himself as he shrank from before his strokes ; as he shuddered at the heroic fierceness of a countenance which seemed more than mortal. Was it indeed the Scottish chieftain ? or some armed delegate from heaven descended to fight the battles of the oppressed ? Edward trembled ; his mace was struck from his hand ; but immediately a glittering falchion supplied its place, and with recovering presence of mind he renewed the combat.

Meanwhile the young Bruce, checking the onward speed of March, pierced him at once through the heart: "Die, thou disgrace to the name of Scot," cried he, "and with thy blood expunge my stains!" His sword now laid all opposition at his feet; and while the tempest of death blew around, the groans of the dying, the shrieks of the wounded, and the outcries of those who were perishing in the flames, drove the king's ranks to distraction, and raised so great a fear in the minds of the Cummin clan that, breaking from the royal line with yells of dismay, they fled in all directions, after their already fugitive allies.

Edward saw the Earl of March fall; and finding himself wounded in many places, with a backward step he received the blows of Wallace, but that determined chief, following his advantage, made a stroke at the king which threw him astounded into the arms of his followers. At that moment Lincoln raised his arm to strike his dagger into the back of Wallace, but Graham arrested the blow, and sent the young lord to the earth. The Southron ranks closed immediately before their insensible monarch, and a contest more desperate than any which had preceded it, took place. Hosts seemed to fall on both sides; at last the Southrons (having stood their ground till Edward was carried from further danger) suddenly wheeled about and fled precipitately towards the east. Wallace pursued them on full charge, driving them across the lowlands of Linlithgow, where he learnt that the Earl of Carrick was in the Lothians, having retreated thither on the first tidings that the Scots had attacked the English camp.

"Now is your time," said Wallace to Bruce, "to rejoin your father. Bring him to Scotland, where a free crown awaits him. Your actions of this night must be a pledge to your country of the virtues which will support his throne!"

The young warrior, throwing off his rugged hauberkin in a retired glen, appeared again as a prince, and embracing the regent, "A messenger from myself or from my father," said he, "shall meet you at Stirling; meanwhile, farewell!—and give my thanks to the young Gordon, whose sword armed me for Scotland!" Bruce mounted the horse Wallace had prepared, and spurring along the banks of the Almond, was soon lost amidst its shades.

Wallace still led the pursuit of Edward, and meeting the auxiliaries, he poured his troops through Ettrick Forest, and drove the flying host of England far into Northumberland.

There, checking his triumphant squadrons, he recalled his stragglers, and returned with abated speed into his own country.

At Peebles he was agreeably surprised by the sight of Edwin. Though ignorant of the recommenced hostilities of Edward, Lord Ruthven became so impatient to resume his duties, that as soon as he was able to move, he had set off on his return to Perth. On arriving at Huntingtower he was told of the treachery of March, also of his fate, and that the regent had beaten the enemy on the banks of the Carron, and was pursuing him into his own dominions. Ruthven was inadequate to the exertion of following the successful troops, but Edwin would not be detained, and crossing the Forth into Mid-Lothian, had sped his way, until the happy moment that brought him again to the side of his first and dearest friend.

As they continued their route together, Edwin inquired the events of the past time, and heard them related with wonder, horror, and gratitude. Grateful for the preservation of Wallace, grateful for the rescue of his country from the menaced destruction, for some time he could only clasp his friend's hand with strong emotion to his heart. The death of his uncle Bothwell made that heart tremble within him at the thought of how much severer might have been his deprivation : at last he said : " But if my uncle Mar and our brave Graham were in the last conflict, where are they that I do not see them share your victory ? " " I hope," returned Wallace, " that we shall rejoin them in safety at Stirling. Our troops parted in the pursuit, and after having sent back the lowland chieftains, you see I have none with me now but my own followers."

But these comfortings were soon dispelled by the appearance of Lord Ruthven, who, having been apprised of the regent's approach, came forth to meet him. The pleasure of seeing the earl so far recovered as to have been able to leave Huntingtower was checked by the first glance of his face, on which was deeply characterised some tale of grief. Edwin thought it was the recent disasters of Scotland he mourned, and with a cheering voice he exclaimed, " Courage, my father ! our regent comes again a conqueror ! Edward has once more recrossed the plains of Northumberland ! "

" Thanks be to God for that ! " replied Ruthven ; " but what have not these last conflicts cost our country ! Lord Mar is wounded unto death, and lies in a chamber next to the yet unburied corpses of Lord Bute and the dauntless Graham."

Wallace turned deadly pale ; a mist passed over his eyes, and staggering, he breathlessly supported himself on the arm of Edwin. Murray looked on him : but all was still in his heart : his own beloved father had fallen, and in that stroke Fate seemed to have emptied all her quiver.

“Lead me to their chambers!” cried Wallace: “show me where my friends lie ; let me hear the last prayer for Scotland from the lips of the bravest of her veterans !”

Ruthven turned his horse, and, as he rode along, he informed the regent that Edwin had not left Huntingtower for the Forth half an hour when an express arrived there from Falkirk. By it he learnt that, as soon as the inhabitants of Stirling saw the fire of the Southron camp, they had hastened thither to enjoy the spectacle. Some, bolder than the rest, entered its deserted confines, and amidst the slaughtered, near the royal tent, one of these visitors thought he distinguished groans. He stooped to render assistance, and soon found it to be Lord Mar. The earl begged to be carried to some shelter, that he might see his wife and daughter before he died. The people drew him out from under his horse, and conveyed him to Falkirk, where they lodged him in the convent. “A messenger was instantly despatched to me, and I set out immediately. I saw my dying brother-in-law. At his request, that others might not be left to suffer what he had endured under the pressure of the slain, the field had been sought for the wounded. Many were conveyed into the neighbouring houses, while the dead were consigned to the earth. Many of our fallen nobles have been conveyed to the cemetery of their ancestors : but the bodies of Sir John Graham and my brother Bothwell,” said he, in a lower tone, “I have retained till your return.” “You have done right,” replied Wallace, and, spurring forward he stopped before the cell which contained the dying chief, and desired the abbot to apprise the earl of his arrival. The sound of that voice penetrated to the ear of his almost insensible friend. Mar started from his pillow, and Wallace through the half-open door heard him say “Let him come in ! All my mortal hopes now hang on him.”

Wallace instantly stepped forward, and beheld the veteran stretched on a couch. He hastened towards him : and the dying man, stretching forth his arms, exclaimed — “Come to me, Wallace, my son, the only hope of Scotland, the only human trust of this anxious paternal heart !”

Wallace threw himself on his knees beside him, and taking his hand, pressed it in speechless anguish to his lips ; every present grief was then weighing on his soul, and denied him the power of utterance. Lady Mar sat by the pillow of her husband, but she bore no marks of the sorrow which convulsed the frame of Wallace. She looked serious, but her cheek wore its freshest bloom. She spoke not, and the veteran allowed the tears of enfeebled nature to fall on the bent head of his friend. "Mourn not for me," cried he, "nor think that these are regretful drops. I die as I have wished, in the field for Scotland. Time must have soon laid my grey hairs ignobly in the grave ; and to enter it thus, covered with honourable wounds, is glory, and has long been my prayer. But dearest, most unwearied of friends, still the tears of mortality will flow, for I leave my children fatherless in this faithless world. And my Helen ! Oh ! Wallace, the angel who exposed her precious self through the dangers of that midnight walk to save Scotland, her father, and his friends, is—lost to us ! Joanna, tell the rest," said he, gasping, "for I cannot."

Wallace turned to Lady Mar with an enquiring look of such wild horror that she found her tongue cleave to the roof of her mouth, and her complexion faded into the pallidness of his. "Surely," exclaimed he, "there is not to be a wreck of all that is estimable on earth. The Lady Helen is not dead ?" "No," rejoined the earl ; "but—" he could proceed no further, and Lady Mar forced herself to speak. "She has fallen into the hands of the enemy. On my lord's being brought to this place, he sent for myself and Lady Helen : but in passing by Dunipacis, an armed squadron issued from behind the mound, and putting our attendants to flight, carried her off. I escaped hither. The reason of this attack was explained afterwards by one of the Southrons, who, having been wounded by our escort, was taken, and brought to Falkirk. He said that Lord Aymer de Valence having been sent by his monarch to call Lord Carrick to his assistance, found the Bruce's camp deserted ; but by accident learning that Lady Helen Mar was to be brought to Falkirk, he stationed himself behind Dunipacis, and springing out as soon as our cavalcade was in view, seized her. The rest were allowed to escape. But as the Lord de Valence loves Helen, I cannot doubt he will have sufficient honour not to insult the fame of her family, and so will make her his wife."

"God forbid!" ejaculated Mar, holding up his trembling hands; "God forbid that my blood should ever mingle with that of any one of the people who have wrought such woe to Scotland! Swear to me, Wallace, by your own immaculate honour, that you will move heaven and earth to rescue my Helen from the power of this Southron lord!"

"So help me heaven!" answered Wallace, looking steadfastly upwards. A groan burst from the lips of Lady Mar, and her head sunk on the side of the couch. "What?—Who is that?" exclaimed Mar, raising his head in alarm from his pillow. "Believe it your country, Donald!" replied she: "to what do you bind its only defender? Are you not throwing him into the very centre of his enemies by making him swear to rescue Helen? Think you that De Valence will not foresee a pursuit, and take her into the heart of England? And thither must our regent follow him! Oh, my lord, retract your demand! Release Sir William Wallace from a vow that must destroy him!" "Wallace!" cried the now soul-struck earl, "what have I done! Has a father's anxiety asked of you amiss? If so, pardon me! But if my daughter also must perish for Scotland, take her, O God, uncontaminated, and let us meet in heaven! Wallace, I dare not accept your vow." "But I will fulfil it," cried he. "Let thy heart rest in peace; and by Jesus' help, Lady Helen shall again be in her own country, as free from Southron taint as she is from all mortal sins! De Valence dare not approach her heavenly innocence with violence, and her Scottish heart will never consent to give him a lawful claim to her precious self. Edward's legions are far beyond the borders! but wherever this earl may be, yet I will reach him. For there is a guiding hand above, and the demands of the morning at Falkirk are now to be answered in the halls of Stirling."

Lord Ruthven, followed by Edwin and Murray, entered the room. And the two nephews were holding each a hand of their dying uncle in theirs, when Lady Ruthven appeared at the door of the apartment. She had been informed of the arrival of the regent and her son, and now hastened to give them a sorrowful reception. "Ah, my lord," cried she, as Wallace pressed her cheek to his; "this is not as your triumphs are wont to be greeted! You are still a conqueror, and yet death lies all around us! And our Helen, too!" "Shall be restored to you, by the aid of heaven!" returned he. "What is

yet left for me to do must be done ; and then—" he paused, and added, " the time is not far distant, Lady Ruthven, when we shall all meet in the realms to which so many of our bravest and dearest have just hastened."

With swimming eyes Edwin drew towards his master. " My uncle would sleep," said he ; " he is exhausted, and will recall us when he wakes from rest." The eyes of the veteran were at that moment closed with heavy slumber. Lady Ruthven remained with the countess to watch by him ; and Wallace, gently withdrawing, was followed by Ruthven and the two young men out of the apartment.

CHAPTER LI.

CHURCH OF FALKIRK.

No eye closed that night in the monastery of Falkirk. The Earl of Mar awakened about the twelfth hour, and sent to call Lord Ruthven, Sir William Wallace, and his nephews, to attend him. As they approached, the priests who had just anointed him with the sacred unction, drew back. The countess and Lady Ruthven supported his pillow. He smiled as he heard the advancing steps of those so dear to him. " I send for you," said he, " to give you the blessings of a true Scot and a Christian ! May all who are here in Thy blessed presence, Redeemer of mankind ! " cried he, " die as I do, rather than survive to see Scotland enslaved ! But O ! may they rather long live under that liberty, perpetuated, which Wallace has again given to his country : peaceful will then be their last moments on earth, and full of joy their entrance into heaven ! " His eyes closed as the concluding word died upon his tongue. Lady Ruthven looked intently on him—she bent her face to his, but he breathed no more, and, with a feeble cry, she fell back in a swoon.

The soul of the veteran earl was indeed fled. The countess was taken out of the apartment ; but Wallace, Edwin, and Murray remained, kneeling around the corpse. Anthems for the departed were raised over the body, and when they concluded, the priests throwing over it a cloud of incense, the mourners withdrew, and separated to their chambers.

By daybreak Wallace met Murray by appointment in the cloisters. The remains of his beloved father had been brought from Dunipacis to the convent, and Murray now prepared to

take them to Bothwell Castle, there to be interred in the cemetery of his ancestors. Wallace, who had approved his design, entered with him into the solitary courtyard, where the war-carriage stood which was to convey the deceased earl to Clydesdale. Four soldiers of his clan brought the corse of their lord from a cell, and laid him on his martial bier. His bed was the sweet heather of Falkirk, spread by the hands of his son. As Wallace laid the venerable chief's sword and helmet on his bier, he covered the whole with the flag he had torn from the standard of England in the last victory. "None other shroud is worthy of thy virtues!" cried he. "Dying for Scotland, thus let the memorial of her glory be the witness of thine!"

"Oh! my friend," answered Murray, "thy gracious spirit can divest even death of its gloom. My father yet lives in his fame!"

"And in a better existence, too!" gently replied Wallace, "else the earth's fame were an empty sound—it could not comfort."

The solemn procession, with Murray at its head, departed towards the valleys of Clydesdale, and Wallace returned to his chamber. Two hours before noon he was summoned by the tolling of the chapel bell. The Earl of Bute and his dearer friend were to be laid in their last bed. With a spirit that did not murmur, he saw the earth closed over both graves; but at Graham's he lingered, and when the funeral stone shut even the sod that covered him from his eyes, with his sword's point he drew on the surface these memorable words—

"Mente manumque potens, et Walli fidus Achates,
Conditus hic Gramus, bello interfectus ab Anglis."*

While he yet leaned on the stone, which gently gave way to the registering pen of friendship, to be more deeply engraved afterwards, a monk approached him, attended by a shepherd boy. At the sound of steps Wallace looked up: "This young man," said the father, "brings despatches to the lord regent." Wallace rose, and the youth presented his packet. Withdrawing to a little distance, he broke the seal, and read to this effect—

"My father and myself are in the castle of Durham, and both under arrest. We are to remain so till our arrival in London

* These lines may be translated thus:—

Here lies
The powerful in mind and body, the friend of Wallace;
Graham, faithful unto death! slain in battle by the English.

renders its sovereign, in his own opinion, more secure ; when there, you shall hear from me again. Meanwhile, be on your guard, the gold of Edward has found its way into your councils. Beware of them who, with patriotism in their mouths, are purchased to betray you and their country into the hands of your enemy ! Truest, noblest, best of Scots, farewell ! I must not write more explicitly.

“ P.S.—The messenger who takes this is a simple border shepherd ; he knows not whence comes the packet, hence he cannot bring an answer.”

Wallace closed the letter ; and putting gold into the shepherd's hand, left the chapel. In passing through the cloisters he met Lord Ruthven, just returned from Stirling, whither he had gone to inform the chiefs of the council of the regent's arrival. “ When I summoned them to the council-hall,” continued Lord Ruthven, “ and told them you had not only defeated Edward on the Carron, but in so doing had gained a double victory—over a foreign usurper and domestic traitors !—instead of the usual open-hearted gratulations on such a communication, a low whisper murmured through the hall ; and the young Badenoch, unworthy of his patriotic father, rising from his seat, gave utterance to so many invectives against you, our country's soul and arm ! I should deem it treason even to repeat them. Suffice it to say, that out of five hundred chieftains who were present, not one of those parasites who used to fawn on you a week ago, now breathes one word for Sir William Wallace. But this ingratitude I bore with patience till Badenoch declared that late last night despatches had arrived from the King of France to the regent, and that he (in right of birth, assuming to himself that dignity) had put their bearer, Sir Alexander Ramsay, under confinement, for having persisted to dispute his authority to withhold them from you.”

Wallace, who had listened in silence, drew a deep sigh as Ruthven concluded, and exclaimed—“ God must be our fortress still ; must save Scotland from this gangrene in her heart ! Ramsay shall be released : but I must first meet these violent men. And it must be alone, my lord,” continued he ; “ you, and our coadjutors, may wait my return at the city gates ; but the sword of Edward, if need be, shall defend me against his gold.” As he spoke, he laid his hand on the

jewelled weapon which hung at his side, and which he had wrested from that monarch in the last conflict.

Aware that this treason, aimed at him, would strike his country, unless timely warded off, he took his resolution ; and requesting Ruthven not to communicate to any one that had passed, he mounted his horse, and struck into the road to Stirling. He took the plume from his crest, and closing his visor, enveloped himself in his plaid, that the people might not know him as he went along. But casting away his cloak, and unclasping his helmet at the door of the keep, he entered the council-hall, openly and abruptly. By an instantaneous impulse of respect, which even the base pay to virtue, almost every man arose at his appearance. He bowed to the assembly, and walked, with a composed but severe air, up to his station at the head of the room. Young Badenoch stood there ; and as Wallace approached, he fiercely grasped his sword : “ Proud upstart ! ” cried he ; “ betrayer of my father ! set a foot further towards this chair, and the chastisement of every arm in this council shall fall on you for your presumption.”

“ It is not in the arms of thousands to put me from my right,” replied Wallace, calmly putting forth his hand, and drawing the regent’s chair towards him.

“ Will ye bear this ? ” cried Badenoch, stamping with his foot, and plucking forth his sword ; “ is the man to exist who thus braves the assembled lords of Scotland ? ” While speaking he made a desperate lunge at the regent’s breast ; Wallace caught the blade in his hand, and wrenching it from his adversary, broke it into shivers, and cast the pieces at his feet : then, turning resolutely towards the chiefs, who stood appalled, and looking on each other, he said, “ I, your duly elected regent, left you only a few days ago, to repel the enemy whom the treason of Lord March would have introduced into these very walls. Many brave chiefs followed me to that field ! and more, whom I see now, loaded me as I passed with benedictions. Portentous was the day of Falkirk to Scotland. Then did the mighty fall, and the heads of council perish. But treason was the parricide ! The late Lord Badenoch stood his ground like a true Scot ; but Athol and Buchan deserted to Edward.” While speaking, he turned towards the furious son of Badenoch, who, gnashing his teeth in impotent rage, stood listening to the inflaming whispers of Macdougall of Lorn ; “ Young chief,” cried he, “ from their treachery date the fate of your brave

father, and the whole of our grievous loss of that day ; but the wide destruction has been avenged ! more than chief for chief have perished in the Southron ranks, and thousands of the lowlier sort now swell the banks of Carron. Edward himself fell, wounded by my arm, and was borne by his flying squadrons over the wastes of Northumberland. Thus have I returned to you with my duties achieved in a manner worthy of your regent. What, then, means the arrest of my ambassador ? what this silence when the representative of your power is insulted to your face ? ”

“ They mean,” cried Badenoch, “ that my words are the utterances of their sentiments.” “ They mean,” cried Lorn, “ that the prowess of the haughty boaster, whom their intoxicated gratitude raised from the dust, shall not avail him against the indignation of a nation over which he dares to arrogate a right.”

“ Mean they what they will,” returned Wallace, “ they cannot dispossess me of the rights with which assembled Scotland invested me on the plains of Stirling. And again I demand by what authority do you and they presume to imprison my officer, and withhold from me the papers sent by the King of France to the regent of Scotland ? ”

“ By an authority that we will maintain,” replied Badenoch ; “ by the right of my royal blood, and by the sword of every brave Scot who spurns the name of Wallace ! ” “ And as a proof that we speak not more than we act,” cried Lorn, making a sign to the chiefs, “ you are our prisoner ! ” Many weapons were instantly unsheathed ; and their bearers, hurrying to the side of Badenoch and Lorn, attempted to lay hands on Wallace, but he, drawing the sword of Edward, set his back against the wall, and exclaimed—“ He that first makes a stroke at me shall find his death on this Southron steel ! This sword I made the usurper yield to me ; and this sword shall defend the regent of Scotland against his ungrateful countrymen ! ”

The chieftains who pressed on him recoiled at these words, but Badenoch and Lorn waved them forward, with vehement exhortations. “ Desist, young men ! ” continued he ; “ provoke me not beyond my bearing. With a single blast of my bugle, I could surround this building with a band of warriors, who at sight of their chief being thus assaulted would lay this tumult in blood. Let me pass, or abide the consequence ! ”

“ Through my breast then ! ” exclaimed Badenoch ; “ for,

with my consent, you pass not here but on your bier. What is in the arm of a single man," cried he to the lords, "that ye cannot fall on him at once and cut him down?"

"I would not hurt a son of Badenoch," returned Wallace; "but his life be on your heads," said he, turning to the chiefs, "if one of you point a sword to impede my passage." "And wilt thou dare it, usurper of my power and honours?" cried Badenoch. "Lorn, stand by your friend—all here who are true to the Cummin and Macdougall, hem in the tyrant."

Many a traitor hand now drew forth its dagger, and Badenoch, drunk with choler and mad ambition, made another violent plunge at Wallace, but its metal flew in splinters on the guard-stroke of the regent, and left Badenoch at his mercy. "Defend me, chieftains, or I am slain!" cried he. But Wallace did not let his hand follow its advantage; with the dignity of conscious desert, he turned from the vanquished, and casting the enraged Lorn from him, who had thrown himself in his way, he exclaimed—"Scots, that arm will wither which dares to point its steel at me!" The pressing crowd, struck in astonishment, parted before him, and, unimpeded, he passed to the door.

That their regent had entered the keep was soon rumoured through the city; and when he appeared from the gate he was hailed by the acclamations of the people. He found his empire again in the hearts of the lowly, whom he had restored to their cottages, while they whom he had restored to castles, and elevated from a state of vassalage to the power of princes, raised against him that very power to lay him in the dust.

Now it was, when surrounded by the grateful citizens of Stirling (whom it would have been as easy for him to have inflamed to the massacre of Badenoch and his council, as to have lifted his bugle to his lips), that he blew the summons for his captains. Every man in the keep flew to arms, expecting that Wallace was returning upon them with the host he had threatened. In a few minutes Lord Ruthven, with his followers, entered the inner balium gate. Wallace smiled proudly as they drew near. "My lords," said he, "you come to witness the last act of my delegated power! Sir Alexander Scrymgeour, enter into that hall, which was once the seat of council, and tell the men who fill it, that for the peace of Scotland, which I value more than my life, I allow them to stand unpunished of their offence against me. But the outrage they

have committed on the freedom of one of her bravest sons I will not pardon, unless he be immediately set at liberty ; let them deliver to you Sir Alexander Ramsay, and then I permit them to hear my final decision. If they refuse obedience they are all my prisoners, and, but for my pity on their blindness, should perish by the laws."

Eager to open the prison door for his friend Ramsay, and little suspecting to what he was calling the insurgents, Scrymgeour hastened to obey. Lorn and Badenoch gave him a very rough reception, uttering such defiance of the regent that the brave standard-bearer lost all patience. "The courtyard," cried he, "is armed with thousands of the regent's followers ; obey, or this will be a more grievous day for Scotland than even that of Falkirk ; for the castle of Stirling will run with Scottish blood !" At this menace Badenoch became more enraged, and Scrymgeour, seeing no chance of prevailing by argument, sent a messenger to privately tell Wallace the result. The regent immediately placed himself at the head of twenty men, and re-entering the keep, went directly to the warder, whom he ordered to deliver Sir Alexander Ramsay into his hands. He was obeyed, and returned with his recovered chieftain to the platform. When Scrymgeour was apprised of the knight's release, he turned to Badenoch, with whom he was still contending in furious debate, and demanded, "Will you or will you not attend me to the regent ? He," added he, addressing the chieftains, "who in this simple duty disobey shall receive from him the severer doom."

Badenoch and Lorn, affecting to deride this menace, replied, they would not for an empire do the usurper the homage of a moment's attention ; but if any of their followers chose to view the mockery they were at liberty. A very few, and those of the least turbulent spirits, ventured forth. They began to fear having embarked in a desperate cause ; and, by their present acquiescence, were willing to deprecate the wrath of Wallace, while thus assured of not exciting the resentment of Badenoch.

When Wallace looked around him and saw the space before the keep filled with armed men and citizens, he ascended an elevated piece of ground, which rose a little to the left, and waving his hand in token that he intended to speak, a profound silence took the place of the buzz of admiration, gratitude, and discontent. He then addressed the people. "Brother

soldiers ! Friends ! And am I so to distinguish Scots ? Enemies ! ” At this word, a loud cry of “ Perish all who are the enemies of our glorious regent ! ” penetrated to the inmost chambers of the citadel.

Believing that the few of his partisans who had ventured out were falling under the vengeance of Wallace, Badenoch, followed by the rest, sallied towards the door, but there he stopped, for he saw his friends standing unmolested.

Wallace proceeded, and, with calm dignity, announced the hatred that was now poured upon him by a large part of that nobility who had been so eager to invest him with the high office he held. “ Though they have broken their oaths,” cried he, “ I have fulfilled mine ! They vowed to me all lawful obedience : I swore to free Scotland or to die. Every castle in this realm is restored to its ancient lord ; every fortress is filled with a native garrison ; the sea is covered with our ships, and the kingdom sits secure behind her well-defended bulwarks. Such have I, through the strength of the Almighty arm, made Scotland ! Beloved by a grateful people, I could wield half her power to the destruction of the rest ; but I would not pluck one stone out of the building I have raised. To-day I deliver up my commission, since its design is accomplished. I resign the regency.” As he spoke, he took off his helmet, and stood uncovered before the people.

“ No, no ! ” seemed the voice from every lip ; “ we will acknowledge no other power, we will obey no other leader ! ”

Wallace expressed his sense of their attachment ; but repeating to them that he had fulfilled the end of his office by setting them free, he explained that his retaining it was no longer necessary. “ Should I remain your regent,” continued he, “ the country would be involved in ruinous dissensions. The majority of your nobles now find a vice in the virtue they once extolled, and seeing its power no longer needful, seek to destroy my upholders with myself. I therefore remove the cause of contention. I quit the regency, and I bequeath your liberty to the care of your chiefs. But, should it be again in danger, remember, that while life breathes in this heart, the spirit of William Wallace will be with you still ! ”

With these words he descended the mound and mounted his horse, amidst the cries and tears of the populace. They clung to his garments as he rode along ; and the women, with their children, throwing themselves on their knees in his path,

implored him not to leave them to the inroads of a ravager ; not to abandon them to the tyranny of their own lords, who, unrestrained by a king, or a regent like himself, would soon subvert his good laws, and reign despots over every district in the country. Wallace answered their entreaties with the language of encouragement ; adding, that he was not their prince to lawfully maintain a disputed power over the legitimate chiefs of the land—" But," he said, " a rightful sovereign may yet be yielded to your prayers—and to procure that blessing, daughters of Scotland, night and day invoke the Giver of every good gift."

When Wallace and his train separated at the foot of Falkirk Hill, he was met by his veterans of Lanark, who, having heard of what had passed in the citadel, advanced to declare that they never would fight under any other commander. " Wherever you are, my faithful friends," returned he, " you shall still obey my word." When he entered the monastery, the opposition that was made to his resignation of the regency, by the Bishop of Dunkeld, Lord Loch-awe, and others, was so vehement, so persuasive, that had not Wallace been steadily principled not to involve his country in domestic war, he must have yielded to the affectionate eloquence of their pleading. But showing to them the public danger attendant on his provoking the wild ambition of the Cummins, and their multitudinous adherents, his arguments at last ended the debate. He then rose, saying, " I have yet to perform my vow to our lamented Mar. I shall seek his daughter, and then, my brave companions, you shall hear of me, and, I trust, see me again ! "

CHAPTER LII.

THE MONASTERY.

It being Lady Ruthven's wish that the remains of her brother should be entombed with his ancestors, preparations were made for the mournful cavalcade to set forth towards Braemar Castle. The countess, hoping that Wallace might be induced to accompany them, did not long object to this proposal, which Lady Ruthven had enforced with tears. Had anyone seen the two, and been called upon to judge by their deportment of the relationship in which each lady stood to the deceased, he must have decided that the sister was the widow. At the moment of her husband's death, Lady Mar had felt a shock ;

but it was not that of sorrow for her loss : she had long looked to this event as to the seal of her happiness : it was the sight of mortality that appalled her. The man she doted on, nay, even herself, must one day lie as the object now before her—dead—insensible to all earthly joys or pains ! but awake, perhaps, fearfully awake, to the judgments of another world ! But the impression was evanescent. Every obstacle between her and Wallace she now believed removed. Her husband was dead ; Helen was carried away by a man devotedly enamoured of her, and most probably was at that time his wife. The spectres of conscience passed from her eyes ; she no longer thought of death and judgment ; and, under a pretence that her feelings could not bear the sight of her husband's bier, she determined to seclude herself in her own chamber till the freshness of Wallace's grief for his friend should have passed away. But when she heard from Edwin of the rebellious conduct of the young Lord Badenoch, and that the regent had abdicated, her consternation superseded all caution. " I will soon humble that proud boy," exclaimed she, " and let him know that, in opposing the elevation of Sir William Wallace, he treads down his own interest. You are beloved by the regent, Edwin ? " cried she, " teach him the true interests of his country ! I am the first woman of the house of Cummin ; and is not that family the most powerful* in the kingdom ? By the adherence of one branch to Edward, the battle of Falkirk was lost ; by the rebellion of another, the regent of Scotland is obliged to relinquish that dignity ! It is in my power to move the whole race at my will ; and if Wallace would mingle his blood with theirs, would espouse me (an overture which the love I bear my country impels me to make), every nerve would then be strained to promote the elevation of their nearest kinswoman—Wallace would reign in Scotland and the whole land lie at peace."

Edwin eyed her with astonishment while she spoke. All her late conduct to his cousin Helen, to his uncle, and to Wallace, was now explained ; and he saw in her flushed cheek that it was not the patriot who desired this match, but the enamoured woman.

* The family of Cummin was so powerful and numerous that an incredible number of chieftains of that name attended the first parliament which Robert I. held at Dunstaffnage Castle. The relationship between the heiress of Strathearn and that family was very near, her paternal grandmother having been the daughter of a Lord Badenoch.

“ You do not answer me,” said she ; “ have you any apprehension that Sir William Wallace would reject the hand which would give him a crown ? which would dispense happiness to many thousand people ? ”

“ No,” replied he ; “ I believe that, much as he is devoted to the memory of her, whom alone he can ever love, could he purchase true happiness to Scotland by the sacrifice, he would espouse any virtuous woman who could bring him so blessed a dowry. But in your case, I can see no probability of such a consequence. In the first place, I know, that now the Earl of Badenoch is no more, he neither respects nor fears the Cummins ; and that he would scorn to purchase a crown, or even the people’s happiness, by baseness to himself. To rise by their means, who will at any time immolate all that is sacred to man to their own caprice, or fancied interests, would be unworthy of him ; therefore, I am sure if you wish to marry Sir William Wallace, you must not urge the use he may make of the Cummins as an argument. He need not stoop to cajole the men he may command. Did he not drive the one-half of their clan, with the English host to boot, to seek any shelter from his vengeance ? And for them in the citadel, had he chosen to give the word, they would now be all numbered with the dust ! Aunt ! he has a Divine master, whose example he follows, though in deep humility ! He lays down his power, it is not taken from him. Earthly crowns are dross to him who looks for a heavenly one. Therefore, honoured lady, believe it no longer necessary to wound your delicacy by offering him a hand which cannot produce the good you meditate ! ”

The complexion of the countess varied a thousand times during this answer. Her reason assented to many parts of it ; but the passion she could not acknowledge to her nephew urged her to persist. “ You may be right, Edwin,” she replied, “ but still, as there is nothing very repugnant in me, the project is surely worth trying ! At any rate, even setting the Cummins aside, a marriage with the daughter of Strathern, by allying your noble friend to every illustrious house in the kingdom, would make his interest theirs, and all must unite in retaining to him the regency. Scotland will be wrecked should he leave the helm ; and, Edwin, though your young heart is yet unacquainted with the strange inconsistencies of the tenderest passion, I must whisper you that your friend will never be happy till he again live in the bosom of domestic affection.”

“ Ah ! but where is he to find it ? ” cried Edwin. “ What will ever restore his Marion to his arms ? ”

“ I,” cried she—“ I will be more than ever Marion was to him ! She knew not—O ! she could not—the boundless love that fills my heart for him ! ” Edwin’s blushes at this wild declaration told her how far she had betrayed herself. She attempted to palliate what she could no longer conceal, and, covering her face with her hand, exclaimed, “ You, who love Sir William Wallace, cannot be surprised that all who adore human excellence should participate the sentiment. How could I see him, the benefactor of my family, the blessing to all Scotland, and not love him ? ”

“ True,” replied Edwin ; “ but not as a wife would love her husband ! You were married. And was it possible you could feel thus when my uncle lived ? So strong a passion cannot have grown in your breast since he died ; for surely, love should not enter a widow’s heart at the side of an unburied husband ! ”

“ Edwin ! ” replied she, “ you, who never felt the throbs of this tyrant, judge with a severity you will one day regret. When you love, and struggle with a passion that drinks your very life, you will pity Joanna of Mar, and forgive her ! ”

“ I pity you now,” replied he, “ but you bewilder me. I cannot understand the possibility of a virtuous married woman suffering any passion of this kind to get such domination over her as to cause her one guilty sigh ; for guilty must every wish be that militates against the duty of her marriage vow. Surely love comes not in a whirlwind to seize the soul at once, but grows by degrees, according to the development of the virtues of the object and the freedom we give ourselves in their contemplation—and if it be virtue that you love in Sir William Wallace, had you not virtue in your noble husband ? ”

The countess perceived that Edwin was deeper read in the human heart than she had suspected ; and therefore, with a deep blush, she replied, “ Think for a moment before you condemn me. I acknowledge every good quality that your uncle possessed ; but, oh ! Edwin, he had frailties that you know not of—frailties that reduced me to be, what the world never saw, the most unhappy of women.” Edwin turned pale at this charge against his uncle, and, while he forbore to draw aside the veil which covered the sacred dead, little did he think

that the artful woman meant a frailty in which she had equally shared, and the consequences of which dangerous vanity had constrained her to become his wife. She proceeded—"I married your uncle when I was a girl, and knew not that I had a heart. I saw Wallace; his virtues stole me from myself, and I found—in short, Edwin, your uncle became of too advanced an age to sympathise with my younger heart. How could I, then, defend myself against the more congenial soul of your friend? He was reserved during Mar's life! but he did not repulse me with unkindness. I therefore hope; and do you, Edwin, gently influence him in my favour, and I will forever bless you."

"Aunt," answered he, looking at her attentively, "can you, without displeasure, hear me speak a few, perhaps, ungrateful truths?"

"Say what you will," said she, trembling; "only be my advocate with the noblest of human beings, and I can take nought amiss."

"Lady Mar," resumed he, "I answer you with unqualified sincerity, because I love you, and venerate the memory of my uncle, whose frailties, whatever they might be, were visible to you alone. I answer you with sincerity, because I would spare you much future pain, and Sir William Wallace a task that would pierce him to the soul. You confess that he already knows you love him—that he has received such demonstrations with coldness. Recollect what it is you love him for, and then judge if he could do otherwise. Could he approve affections which a wife transferred to him from her husband, and that husband his friend?" "Ah! but he is now dead!" interrupted she; "that obstacle is removed." "But the other, which you raised yourself!" replied Edwin; "while a wife, you showed to Sir William Wallace that you could not only indulge yourself in wishes hostile to your nuptial faith, but divulge them to him. Ah! my aunt, what could you look for as the consequence of this? My uncle yet lived when you did this! And that act, I am sure, Wallace would never pardon. He never could pledge his faith to one whose passions had so far silenced her sense of duty; and did he even love you, he would not, for the empire of the world, repose his honour in such keeping."

The door opened at this moment, and Lord Ruthven entered. The tears she was shedding on the bosom of his son he attri-

buted to some conversation she might be holding respecting her deceased lord, and taking her hand, he informed her that, unknown to Wallace, Lord Loch-awe had summoned the most powerful of his friends then near Stirling, and attended by them, was carried on a litter into the council-hall; from that bed of honourable wounds, he threatened the assembly with instant vengeance from his troops without, unless they would immediately swear fealty to Wallace, and compel Badenoch to give up the French despatches. Violent tumults were the consequence; but Loch-awe's litter being guarded by a double rank of armed chieftains, and the keep being hemmed round by his men prepared to put to the sword every Scot hostile to the proposition of their lord, the insurgents at last complied, and forced Badenoch to relinquish the royal packet. This effected, Loch-awe and his train returned to the monastery. Wallace refused to resume the dignity he had resigned, the reinvestment of which had been extorted from the lords in the citadel. "No," said he to Loch-awe; "it is indeed time that I should sink into shades where I cannot be found, since I am become a word of contention amongst my countrymen."

"He was not to be shaken," continued Ruthven; "but seeing matter in the French despatches that ought to be answered without delay, he yet remains a few days at Falkirk."

"Then we will await him here," cried the countess. "That cannot be," answered Ruthven: "it would be against ecclesiastical law to detain the sacred dead so long from the grave. Wallace will doubtless visit Braemar, therefore I advise that to-morrow you leave Falkirk."

Edwin seconded this counsel, and fearing to make further opposition she silently acquiesced. But her spirit was not so quiescent. At night her fancy aroused a thousand images of alarm. She remembered the vow that Wallace had made to seek Helen. He had already given up the regency. "Should he love Helen, what is there not to fear?" cried she. "And should he meet her, I am undone!" Racked by jealousy, and goaded by contradicting expectations, she rose from her bed and paced the room in wild disorder. One moment she strained her mind to recollect every gracious look or word from him, and then her imagination glowed with anticipated delight. Again she thought of his address to Helen, of his vow in her favour, and she was driven to despair. All Edwin's admonitions were forgotten; passion alone was

awake, and forgetful of her rank and sex, and of her situation, she determined to see Wallace, and appeal to his heart for the last time. She knew that he slept in an apartment at the other end of the monastery ; and that she might pass thither unobserved, she glided into an opposite cell belonging to a sick monk, and stealing away his cloak, threw it over her and hurried along the cloisters.

The chapel doors were open. In passing she saw the bier of her lord awaiting the hour of its removal, surrounded by priests singing anthems for the repose of his soul. No tender recollections, no remorse, knocked at the heart of Lady Mar as she sped along. Abandoned all to thoughts of Wallace, she felt not that she had a soul ; she acknowledged not that she had a hope, but what centred in the smiles of the man she was hastening to seek.

His door was fastened with a latch ; she gently opened it, and found herself in his chamber. She trembled—she scarcely breathed—she looked around, but he was not there. Disappointment palsied her heart, and she sunk upon a chair.

She now determined to await his return, and nearly three hours she passed there, enduring all the torments of guilt and misery ; but he appeared not. At last, hearing the matin-bell, she started up, fearful that her maids might discover her absence. Compelled by some regard to reputation, she left the shrine of her idolatry, and once more crossed the cloisters. While again drawing towards the chapel, she saw Wallace himself issue from the door, supporting on his bosom the fainting Lady Ruthven. Edwin followed them. Lady Mar pulled the monk's cowl over her face and withdrew behind a pillar. " Ah ! " thought she, " absenting myself from my duty, I fled from thee ! " She listened with breathless attention to what might be said.

Lord Ruthven met them at that instant. " This night's watching by the bier of her brother," said Wallace, " has worn out your gentle lady ; we strove to support her, but at last she sunk." What Ruthven said in reply, when he took his wife in his arms, the countess could not hear ; but Wallace answered, " I have not seen her." " I left her late in the evening, drowned in tears," replied Ruthven in a more elevated tone ; " I suppose that in secret she offers those prayers for her deceased husband which my tender Janet pours over his grave."

"Such tears," replied Wallace, "are heaven's own balm; I know they purify the heart whence they flow. Yes; and the prayers we breathe for those we love unite our souls the closer to theirs. Look up, dear Lady Ruthven," said he, as she began to revive; "look up and hear how you may, while still on earth, retain the society of your beloved brother! Seek his spirit at the footstool of God. 'Tis thus I live, sister of my most venerated friend! My soul is ever on the wing for heaven, whether in the solitary hour, in joy, or in sorrow, for there my treasure lives!"

"Wallace! Wallace!" cried Lady Ruthven, "and art thou a man of earth and of the sword? Oh! rather say, an angel lent us here a little while to teach us to live and to die." A blush passed over the pale cheek of Wallace. "I am a soldier of Him who was, indeed, brought into the world to show us, by His life and death, how to be virtuous and happy. Know me by my life to be His follower; and David himself were not a more glorious title!"

Lady Mar, while she contemplated the matchless form before her, exclaimed to herself, "Why is it animated by as faultless a soul? Oh, Wallace, wert thou less excellent I might hope; but hell is in my heart, and heaven in thine!" and she rushed from the cloisters.

CHAPTER LIII.

DURHAM.

THE sun rose as the funeral procession of the Earl of Mar moved from before the gates of the monastery at Falkirk. Lord Ruthven and Edwin mounted their horses. The maids of the two ladies led them towards the litters which were to convey them so long a journey. Lady Ruthven came first, and Wallace placed her tenderly in her carriage. The countess next appeared, clad in the deep weeds of widowhood. Her child followed, in the arms of its nurse. At the sight of the innocent babe, whom he had so often seen pressed to the fond bosom of the father it was now following to his grave, tears rushed into the eyes of Wallace. Lady Mar hid the tumult of her feelings on the shoulder of her maid. He advanced to her respectfully, and handing her to her vehicle, urged her to cherish life for the sake of her child. She threw herself with increased agitation on her pillow, and Wallace, deeming the

presence of her babe the surest comforter, laid it tenderly by her side. At that moment, she bent her face upon his hands, and bathing them with her tears, murmured, "Oh! Wallace, remember me!" Lord Ruthven rode up to bid adieu to his friend, and the litters moved on. Wallace promised that both he and Edwin should hear of him in the course of a few days; and affectionately grasping the hand of the latter, bade him farewell.

Hear of him they should, but not see him; for it was his determination to set off that night for Durham, where Edward now lay, and, joined by his young queen, meant to sojourn till his wounds were healed. Believing that his presence in Scotland could be no longer serviceable, and would engender continual intestine divisions, Wallace did not hesitate in fixing his course. His first object was to fulfil his vow to Lord Mar. He thought it probable that Helen might have been carried to the English court; and that in seeking her he might also attempt an interview with young Bruce; hoping to learn how far he had succeeded in persuading his father to leave the vassalage of Edward, and once more dare resuming the sceptre of his ancestors.

To effect his plan without hindrance, Wallace retired to his apartment to address a letter to Lord Ruthven. In this he told the chief that he was going on an expedition which he hoped would prove beneficial to his country; but as it was an enterprise of rashness, he would not make any one his companion; he therefore begged Lord Ruthven to teach his friends to consider with candour a flight they might otherwise deem unkind.

All the brother was in his letter to Edwin, conjuring him to prove his affection for his friend by quietly abiding at home till they should meet again in Scotland.

He wrote to Andrew Murray (now Lord Bothwell), addressing him as the first of his compatriots who had struck a blow for Scotland; and, as his dear friend and brother soldier, he confided to his care the valiant troop which had followed him from Lanark. "Tell them," said he, "that in obeying you they still serve with me: they perform their duty to Scotland at home—I abroad; our aim is the same, and we shall meet again at the consummation of our labours."

These letters he enclosed in one to Stryngour, with orders to despatch two of them according to their directions; but

that to Murray, Scrymgeour was himself to deliver at the head of the Lanark veterans.

At the approach of twilight Wallace quitted the monastery, leaving his packet with the porter to present to Scrymgeour when he should arrive at his usual hour. As the chief meant to assume a border-minstrel's garb, that he might travel the country unrecognised, he took his way towards a large hollow oak in Torwood, where he had deposited his means of disguise. When arrived there, he disarmed himself of all but his sword, dirk, and breastplate; he covered his tartan gambeson with a minstrel's cassock; and staining his complexion with the juice of a nut, concealed his locks beneath a close bonnet. Being thus equipped, he threw his harp over his shoulder; and having first in that deep solitude invoked a blessing on his enterprise, he went forth, and under the sweet serenity of a summer night, pursued his way along the broom-clad hills of Muiravonside.

All lay in profound rest. Not a human creature crossed his path till the carol of the lark summoned the husbandman to his toil, and spread the thymy hills and daisied pastures with herds and flocks. He stopped at a little moss-covered cabin on a burnside, beneath Craig Castle in Mid-Lothian, and was hospitably entertained by its simple inhabitants. Wallace repaid their kindness with a few ballads, which he sang, accompanied by his harp. As he gave the last notes of "King Arthur's Death in Glory," the worthy cottar raised his head from the spade on which he leaned, and asked whether he could not sing the glory of Scotland. "Our renowned Wallace," said he, "is worth King Arthur and all the stranger knights of his round table, for he not only conquers for us in war, but establishes us in happy peace. Who, like him, of all our great captains, ever took such care of the poor as to give them not only the bread that sustains temporal but that which supports eternal life? Sing us his praises, minstrel, and tarry with us days instead of hours." Wallace rose with a saddened smile, and replied, "I cannot do what you require; but I can yield you an opportunity to oblige Sir William Wallace. Will you take a letter from him, of which I am the bearer, to Lord Dundaff at Berwick? I have been seeking, what I have now found, a faithful Scot, with whom I could confide this trust. It is to reveal to a father's heart the death of a son, for whom Scotland must mourn to her latest generations."

The honest shepherd respectfully accepted this mission; and

his wife, loading their guest's scrip with fruits and cakes, accompanied him, followed by the children, to the bottom of the hill.

In this manner, sitting at the board of the lowly, and sleeping beneath the thatched roof, did Wallace pursue his way through Tweeddale and Ettrick Forest till he reached the Cheviots. From every lip he heard his own praises, heard them with redoubled satisfaction, for he could have no suspicion of their sincerity, as they were uttered without expectation of their ever reaching the regent's ear.

Late in the evening, he arrived on the banks of the river that surrounds the city of Durham. He crossed Framlingate bridge. His minstrel garb prevented his being stopped by the guard at the gate; but as he entered its porch, a horse that was going through started at his abrupt appearance. Its rider suddenly exclaimed, "Fool, thou dost not see Sir William Wallace!" Then turning to the disguised knight, "Harper," cried he, "you frighten my steed; draw back till I pass!" Not displeased to find the terror of him so great amongst the enemies of Scotland, that they even addressed their animals as sharers in the dread, Wallace stood out of the way, and saw the speaker to be a young Southron knight who with difficulty kept his seat on the restive horse. Rearing and plunging, it would have thrown its rider, had not Wallace put forth his hand and seized the bridle. By his assistance, the animal was soothed; and the young lord, thanking him for his service, told him that, as a reward, he would introduce him to play before the queen, who that day held a feast at the bishop's palace. Wallace thought it probable he might see or hear of Lady Helen in this assembly, or find access to Bruce, and he gladly accepted the offer. The knight, who was Sir Piers Gaveston, ordering him to follow, turned his horse towards the city, and conducted Wallace through the gates of the citadel, to the palace within its walls.

On entering the banqueting-hall, he was placed by the knight in the musicians' gallery, there to await his summons to her majesty. The entertainment being spread, and the room full of guests, the queen was led in by the haughty bishop of the see, the king being too ill of his wounds to allow his joining so large a company. The beauty of the lovely sister of Philip le Bel seemed to fill the gaze and hearts of all the bystanders, and none appeared to remember that Edward was absent.

Wallace hardly glanced on her youthful charms; his eyes roamed from side to side in quest of a fairer, a dearer object—the captive daughter of his dead friend! She was not there; neither was De Valence: but Buchan, Athol, and Soulis were near the royal Margaret, in all the pomp of feudal grandeur.

Immediately on the royal band ceasing to play, Gaveston pressed towards the queen, and told her he had presumed to introduce a travelling minstrel into the gallery; hoping that she would order him to perform for her amusement, as he could sing legends from the descent of the Romans to the victories of her royal Edward. With all her age's eagerness in quest of novelties, she commanded him to be brought to her.

Gaveston having presented him, Wallace bowed with the respect due to her sex and dignity, and to the esteem in which he held the character of her royal brother. Margaret desired him to place his harp before her, and begin to sing. As he knelt on one knee, and struck its sounding chords, she stopped him by the inquiry, of whence he came? "From the north country," was his reply—"Were you ever in Scotland?" asked she. "Many times."

The young lords crowded round to hear this dialogue. She smiled, and turned towards them. "Do not accuse me of disloyalty, but I have a curiosity to ask another question." "Nothing your majesty wishes to know," said Bishop Beck, "can be amiss." "Then tell me," cried she—"for you wandering minstrels see all great people, good or bad, else how could you make songs about them! Did you ever see Sir William Wallace in your travels?" "Often, madam." "Pray tell me what he is like! you probably will be unprejudiced, and that is what I can hardly expect in this case from any of these brave lords." Wishing to avoid further questioning on this subject, Wallace replied, "I have never seen him so distinctly as to be enabled to prove any right to your majesty's opinion of my judgment." "Cannot you sing me some ballad about him!" inquired she, laughing; "and if you are a little poetical in your praise, I can excuse you; for my royal brother thinks this bold Scot would have shone brightly in a fairer cause." "My songs are dedicated to glory set in the grave," returned Wallace; "therefore Sir William Wallace's faults or virtues will not be sung by me." "Then he is a very young man, I suppose? for you are not old, and yet you speak of not surviving him. I was in hopes," cried she, addressing Beck,

“that my lord the king would have brought this Wallace to have supped with me here ; but for once, rebellion overcame its master.”

Beck made some reply which Wallace did not hear, and the queen again turning to him, resumed, “Minstrel, we French ladies are very fond of a good mien ; and I shall be a little reconciled to your northern realms if you tell me this Sir William Wallace is anything like as handsome as some of the gay knights by whom you see me surrounded.” Wallace smiled, and replied, “The comeliness of Sir William Wallace lies in a strong arm and a feeling heart ; and if these be charms in the eyes of female goodness he may hope to be not quite an object of abhorrence to the sister of Philip le Bel !” The minstrel bowed as he spoke, and the young queen laughing again, said, “I wish not to come within the influence of either. But sing me some Scottish legend, and I will promise wherever I see the knight to treat him with all courtesy due to valour.”

Wallace again struck the chords of his harp ; and with a voice whose full and melodious tones rolled round the vast dome of the hall, he sang the triumphs of Reuther.* The queen fixed her eyes upon him ; and when he ended she turned and whispered Gaveston—“If the voice of this man had been Wallace’s trumpet, I should not now wonder at the discomfiture of England. He almost tempted me from my allegiance, as the warlike animation of his notes seemed to charge the flying Southrons.” Speaking, she rose, and presenting a jewelled ring to the minstrel, left the apartment.

The lords crowded out after her, and the musicians coming down from the gallery, seated themselves with much rude jollity to regale on the remnants of the feast. Wallace, who had discovered the senachie of Bruce by the escutcheon of Annandale suspended at his neck, gladly saw him approach. He came to invite the stranger minstrel to partake of their fare. Wallace did not appear to decline it, and as the court bard seemed rather devoted to the pleasures of wine, he found it not difficult to draw from him what he wanted to know. He learnt that young Bruce was still in the castle under arrest ; “and,” added the senachie, “I shall feel no little mortification

* In commemoration of the victory which this ancient Scottish prince obtained over the Britons before the Christian era, the field of conquest has ever since been called Rutherglen.

in being obliged, in the course of half an hour, to relinquish these festivities for the gloomy duties of his apartment."

This was precisely the point to which Wallace had wished to lead him ; and pleading disrelish of wine, he offered to supply his place in the earl's chamber. The half-intoxicated bard accepted the proposition with eagerness ; and as the shades of night had long closed in, he conducted his illustrious substitute to the large round tower of the castle, informing him as they went along, that he must continue playing in a recess adjoining to Bruce's room till the last vesper bell from the abbey in the neighbourhood should give the signal for his laying aside the harp. By that time the earl would be fallen asleep, and he might then lie down on a pallet he would find in the recess.

All this Wallace promised punctually to obey ; and being conducted by the senachie up a spiral staircase, was left in the little ante-room. The chief drew the cowl of his minstrel cloak over his face and set his harp before him in order to play. He could see through its strings that a group of knights were in earnest conversation at the further end of the apartment, but they spoke so low he could not distinguish what was said. One of the party turned round, and the light of a suspended lamp discovered him to be the brave Earl Gloucester, whom Wallace had taken and released at Berwick. The same ray showed another to be Percy, Earl of Northumberland. Wallace found the strangeness of his situation. He, the conqueror of Edward, to have been singing as a mendicant in his halls ; and having given laws to the two great men before him, he now sat in their view unobserved and unfeared ! Their figures concealed that of Bruce, but at last when all rose together, he heard Gloucester say, " Keep up your spirits. This envy of your base countrymen must recoil upon themselves. It cannot be long before King Edward discovers the motives of their accusations, and his noble nature will acquit you accordingly."

" My acquittal," replied Bruce, in a firm tone, " cannot restore what Edward's injustice has rifted from me. I abide by the test of my own actions, and by it will open the door of my freedom. Your king may depend on it," added he, with a sarcastic smile, " that I am not a man to be influenced against the right. Where I owe duty I will pay it to the uttermost farthing."

Wallace could now take a more leisurely survey of Bruce. He no longer wore the gay embroidered hacqueton ; his tunic was black velvet, and all the rest of his garments accorded with the same mourning hue. Soon after the lords had quitted him, the buoyant elasticity gave way to melancholy, and he threw himself into a chair with his hands clasped upon his knee and his eyes fixed upon the floor. It was now that Wallace touched the strings of his harp. The "Death of Cathullin" wailed from the sounding notes ; but Bruce heard as though he heard them not ; they soothed his mood without his perceiving what it was that calmed, yet deepened, the saddening thoughts which possessed him. His posture remained the same ; and sigh after sigh gave the only response to the strains of the bard.

Wallace grew impatient for the chimes of that vesper bell which, by assuring Bruce's attendants that he was gone to rest, would secure from interruption the conference he meditated. Two servants entered. Bruce, scarcely looking up, bade them withdraw ; he should not need their attendance ; he did not know when he should go to bed, and he desired to be no further disturbed. The men obeyed ; and Wallace, changing the melancholy strain of his harp, struck the chords to the proud triumph he had played in the hall. Not one note of either ballad had he yet sung to Bruce ; but when he came to the passage in the latter appropriated to these lines

"Arise, glory of Albin, from thy cloud,
And shine upon thine own !"

he could not forbear giving the words voice. Bruce started from his seat. He looked towards the minstrel—he walked the room in great disorder. The pealing sounds of the harp, and his own mental confusion, prevented his distinguishing that it was not the voice of his *senachie*. The words alone he heard ; and they seemed a call which his heart panted to obey. The hand of Wallace paused upon the instrument. He looked around to see that observation was indeed at a distance. Not that he dreaded harm to himself, for his mind had never known personal fear ; but anxious not to precipitate Bruce into useless danger, he first satisfied himself that all was safe, and then, as the young earl sat in a paroxysm of racking reflections, Wallace slowly advanced from the recess. Bruce accidentally raising his head, beheld a man in a minstrel's garb, much too tall to be

his senachie, approaching him with a caution which he thought portended treachery. He sprang on his feet, and caught his sword from the table ; but, in that moment, Wallace threw off his cowl. Bruce stood gazing on him, stiffened with astonishment. Wallace in a low voice exclaimed, " My prince ! do you not know me ? " Bruce, without speaking, threw his arms about his neck. He was silent, as he hung on him, but his tears flowed ; he had much to say, but excess of emotion rendered it unutterable. As Wallace returned the fond embrace of friendship, he gently said, " How is it that I not only see you a close prisoner, but in these weeds ? " Bruce at last forced himself to articulate : " I have known misery in all its forms since we parted ; but I have not power to name even my grief of griefs, while trembling at the peril to which you have exposed yourself by seeking me ! The vanquisher of Edward, the man who snatched Scotland from his grasp, were he known to be within these walls, would be a prize for which the boiling revenge of the tyrant would give half his kingdom ! I am surrounded by spies ; and should you be discovered, Robert Bruce will then have the curses of his country added to the judgments which already have fallen on his head." As he spoke, they sat down together, and he continued—" Before I answer your questions tell me what immediate cause could bring you to seek the alien Bruce in prison, and by what stratagem you came in this disguise into my apartment ? "

Wallace briefly related the events which had sent him from Scotland, his rencontre with Piers Gaveston, and his arrangement with the senachie. To the first part of the narrative Bruce listened with indignation. " I knew," exclaimed he, " from the boastings of Athol and Buchan that they had left in Scotland some dregs of their own refractory spirits ; but I could not have guessed that envy had so obliterated gratitude in the hearts of my countrymen. The wolves have now driven the shepherd from the fold," cried he, " and the flock will soon be devoured ! Fatal was the hour for Scotland, and your friend, when you yielded to the voice of faction, and relinquished the power which would have finally given peace to the nation ! "

Wallace recapitulated his reasons for having refrained from forcing the obedience of the young Lord Badenoch and his adherents ; for abdicating a dignity he could no longer main-

tain without shedding the blood of the misguided men who opposed him. Bruce acknowledged the wisdom of this conduct, but could not restrain his animadversions on the characters of the Cummins. He told Wallace that he had met the two sons of the late Lord Badenoch in Guienne; that James, who now pretended such resentment of his father's death, had ever been a rebellious son. John, who yet remained in France, appeared of a less violent temper; "but," added the prince, "I have been taught by one who will never counsel me more, that all the Cummins, male and female, would be ready at any time to sacrifice earth and heaven to their ambition. It is to Buchan and Athol that I owe my prolonged confinement, and to them I may date the premature death of my father."

The start of Wallace declared his shock at this information. "How!" exclaimed he, "the Earl of Carrick dead?" The swelling emotions of his soul would not allow him to proceed, and Bruce resumed: "It is for him I wear these sable emblems of the mournings of my soul; mournings not so much for his loss (and that is grievous as ever son bore), but because he lived not to let the world know what he really was; he lived not to bring into light his long-obscured honour! There, there, Wallace, is the bitterness of this cup to me!"

"But can you not sweeten it, my dear prince," cried Wallace, "by retrieving all that he was cut off from redeeming? To open the way to you, I come." "And I will enter where you point," returned Bruce; "but heavy is my woe that, knowing the same spirit was in my father's bosom, he should be torn from the opportunity to make it manifest. Oh, Wallace! that he should be made to lie down in a dishonoured grave! Had he lived, my friend, he would have brightened that name which rumour has sullied, and I should have doubly gloried in wearing the name which he had rendered so worthy of being coupled with the kingly title. Noble was he in soul, but he fell amidst a race of men whose art was equal to their venality, and he became their dupe. Betrayed by friendship, he sunk into the snare, for he had no dishonour in his own breast to warn him of what might be the villainy of others. He believed the cajoling speeches of Edward, who, on the first offence of Baliol, had promised to place my father on the throne. Month after month passed away, and the engagement was unperformed. The disturbances on the continent seemed to his confiding nature a sufficient excuse for these various delays; and he waited in

quiet expectation till your name, my friend, rose glorious in Scotland. My father and myself were then in Guienne; Edward persuaded him that you affected the crown, and he returned with that deceiver to draw his sword against his people and their ambitious idol, for so he believed you to be; and grievous has been the expiation of that fatal hour! Your conference with him on the banks of the Carron opened his eyes; he saw what his credulity had made Scotland suffer; what a wreck he had made of his own fame, and from that moment he resolved to follow another course. But the habit of trusting the affection of Edward inclined him rather to remonstrate on his rights than immediately to take up arms against him; yet, resolved not to strike a second blow on his people, when you assailed the Southron camp he withdrew his few remaining followers, who had survived the hard-fought day of Falkirk, into a remote defile. On quitting you, I came up with him in Mid-Lothian, and never having missed me from the camp, he concluded that I had appeared thus late from having kept in the rear of the division."

Bruce proceeded to narrate the particulars of his father's meeting with the king at Durham. Instead of that monarch receiving the Earl of Carrick with his wonted familiar welcome, he turned coldly from him when he approached, and suffered him to take his usual seat at the royal table without deigning him the slightest notice. Young Bruce was absent from the banquet, having determined never to mingle again in social communion with the man whom he now regarded as the usurper of his father's rights. The absence of the filial eye which had once looked the insolent Buchan into his inherent insignificance, now emboldened this enemy of the house of Carrick; and, supported by Athol and Soulis, the base voluptuary seized a pause in the conversation and said, with affected carelessness, "My Lord of Carrick, to-day you dine with clean hands; the last time I saw you at meat they were garnished with your own blood!" The earl turned on him a look which asked him to explain. Lord Buchan laughed, and continued, "When we last met at table, was it not in his majesty's tent after the victory at Falkirk? You were then red from the slaughter of those bastardised people to whom I understand you now give the fondling appellation of sons. Having recognised the relationship, it was not probable we should again see your hands in their former brave livery, and their

present pallid hue convinces more than myself of the truth of our information."

"And me," cried Edward, rising on the couch to which his wounds confined him, "that I have discovered a traitor! You fled, Lord Carrick, at the first attack which the Scots made on my camp, and you drew thousands after you. I know you too well to believe that cowardice impelled the motion. It was treachery, accursed treachery to your friend and king, and you shall feel the weight of his resentment!" "To this hour, King Edward," replied the earl, starting from his chair, "I have been more faithful to you than to my country or my God! I heard, saw, and believed only what you determined; and I became your slave! the victim of your artifice! How often have you pledged yourself that you fought in Scotland only for my advantage! I gave my faith and my power to you; and how often have you promised, after the next successful battle, to restore me to the crown of my ancestors! I still believed you, and I still engaged all who yet acknowledged the influence of Bruce to support your name in Scotland. Was not such the promise by which you allured me to the field of Falkirk? And when I had covered myself, as Lord Buchan too truly says, with the blood of my children; when I asked my friend for the crown I had served for, what was his answer? 'Have I naught to do but to win kingdoms to make gifts of?' Thus, then, did a king, a friend, break his often-repeated word! What wonder, then, that I should feel the indignation of a prince and a friend, and leave the false, alas! the perjured, to defenders whom he seemed more highly to approve? But of treachery, what have I shown? Rather confidence, King Edward; and the confidence that was awakened in the fields of Palestine brought me hither to-day to remonstrate with you on my rights, when, by throwing myself into the arms of my people, I might have demanded them at the head of a victorious army."

Edward, who had been prepared by the Cummins to discredit all that Carrick might say in his defence, turned with a look of contempt towards him, and said, "You have been persuaded to act like a madman, and as maniacs, both yourself and your son shall be guarded till I have leisure to consider any rational evidence you may in future offer in your vindication." "And is this the manner, King Edward, that you treat your friend, once your preserver?" "The vassal,"

replied Edward, "who presumes upon the condescension of his prince, and acts as if he were really his equal, ought to meet the punishment due to such arrogance. You saved my life on the walls of Acre, but you owed that duty to the son of your liege lord. In the fervour of youth I inconsiderately rewarded you with my friendship, and the return is treason." As he concluded he turned from Lord Carrick, and the marshals immediately seizing the earl, took him to the keep of the castle.*

His son, who had been sought in the Carrick quarters, and laid under an arrest, met his father in the guard-chamber. Carrick could not speak; but motioning to be conducted to the place appointed for his prison, the men with equal silence led him through a range of apartments which occupied the middle storey, and stopping in the furthest, left him there with his son. Bruce was not surprised at his own arrest, but at that of his father he stood in speechless astonishment until the guards withdrew; then, seeing Lord Carrick with a changing countenance throw himself on the bed, he exclaimed, "What is the meaning of this, my father? Has any charge against me brought suspicion on you?" "No, Robert, no," replied the earl; "it is I who have brought you into this prison, and into disgrace; disgrace with all the world, for having tacitly surrendered my inheritance to the invader of my country. Honest men abhor, villains treat me with contumely; and he for whom I incurred all this, because I would not, when my eyes were open to my sin, again imbrue my hands in the blood of my country, Edward thrusts me from him! You are implicated in my crime, and for not joining the Southrons to repel the Scots from the royal camp we are both prisoners!"

"Then," replied Bruce, "he shall feel that you have a son who has virtue to be what he suspects; and from this hour I proclaim eternal enmity to the betrayer of my father!"

The indignation of the youthful prince wrought him to so vehement a declaration of resolute and immediate hostility that Lord Carrick was obliged to give his transports way; but when he saw that his denunciations were exhausted, though not the determined purpose of his soul, Carrick gazed on him with pride, yet grief, and sighing heavily, called him to approach him. "Come to me, Robert?" said he, "hear and

* These speeches are historically true, as is also Edward's after treatment of the Earl of Carrick.

abide by the last injunctions of your father, for from this bed I may never rise more. A too late sense of the injuries my sanction has doubled on the people I was born to protect, and the ingratitude of him for whom I have offended my God and wronged my country, have broken my heart. I shall die, Robert, but you will avenge me!" "May God so prosper me!" cried Bruce, raising his arms to heaven. Carrick resumed—"Attend to me, my dear and brave son, and do not mistake the nature of my last wish. Do not allow the perhaps too forcible word I have used to hurry you into any personal revenge on Edward. Let him live to feel and to regret the outrages he has committed on the peace and honour of his too faithful friend. Pierce him on the side of his ambition, there he is vulnerable, and there you will heal while you wound. This would be my revenge, dear Robert, that you should one day have his life in your power, and in memory of what I now say, spare it. When I am gone, think not of private resentment. Let your aim be the recovery of the kingdom which Edward rifled from your fathers. Join the virtuous Wallace. Tell him of my remorse, of my fate, and be guided wholly by his counsels. Do this," added Carrick, "and I shall live fair in the memories of men. But be violent, threaten Edward from these walls, menace the wretches who have trodden on the grey hairs of their prince, and your voice will be heard no more; this ground will drink your blood, and blindly-judging infamy will for ever after point to our obscure graves!"

Such persuasives at last prevailed with Bruce, and next day, writing the hasty lines which Wallace received at Falkirk, he entrusted them to his senachie, who conveyed them to Scotland by means of the shepherd youth.

Shortly after the despatch of this letter the presage of Lord Carrick was verified; he was seized in the night with spasms and died in the arms of his son.

When Bruce related these particulars his grief and indignation became so violent that Wallace was obliged to enforce the dying injunctions of the father he thus vehemently deplored to moderate the delirium of his soul. "Ah!" exclaimed the young earl, "I have indeed needed some friend to save me from myself, some one to reconcile me to the Robert Bruce who has so long slept in the fatal delusions which poisoned his father and laid him low! Oh! Wallace! at times I am mad. I know not whether this forbearance be not cowardice. I doubt

whether my father meant what he spoke, that he did not yet seek to preserve the life of his son at the expense of his honour, and I have been ready to precipitate myself on the steel of Edward, so that he should but meet the point of mine ! ”

Bruce then added that in his more rational meditations he had resolved to attempt an escape in the course of a few days. He understood that a deputation of English barons, seeking a ratification of their charter, were soon to arrive in Durham ; the bustle attendant on their business would, he hoped, draw attention from him, and afford him the opportunity he sought. “ In that case,” continued he, “ I should have made direct to Stirling, and had not Providence conducted you to me, I might have unconsciously thrown myself into the midst of enemies. James Cummin is too ambitious to have allowed my life to pass unattempted.”

Whilst he was yet speaking, the door burst open, and Bruce’s two attendants rushed into the room with looks aghast. Bruce and Wallace started on their feet and laid their hands on their swords. But instead of anything hostile appearing behind the servants, the inebriated figure of the senachie staggered forward. The men stood staring and trembling, and looking from the senachie to Wallace ; at last one, falling on his knees, exclaimed, “ Blessed St. Andrew ! here is the senachie and his wraith.” Bruce perceived the mistake of his servants, and explaining to them that a travelling minstrel had obliged the senachie by performing his duty, he bade them retire to rest, and think no more of their alarm.

The intoxicated bard threw himself without ceremony on his pallet, in the recess, and the servants, though convinced, still shaking with superstitious fright, entreated permission to bring their heather beds into their lord’s chamber. To deny them was impossible, and all further converse with Wallace that night being put an end to, a couch was laid for him in an interior apartment, and with a grateful pressure of the hands, in which their hearts silently embraced, the chiefs separated to repose.

CHAPTER LIV.

THE BISHOP’S PALACE.

THE second matin bell sounded from the abbey before the eyes of Wallace opened from the deep sleep which had sealed them.

A bath refreshed him from every toil, then renewing the stain on his face and hands with the juice of a nut which he carried about him, and once more covering his martial figure and golden hair with the minstrel's cassock and cowl, he rejoined his friend.

The table was spread when Wallace entered, and several servants were in attendance. Bruce made a sign to him to take his place at a board near his own. To prevent suspicion in the attendants (some of whom might be spies of Edward's), during the repast he discoursed with Wallace on subjects relative to northern literature, repeating indeed many passages apposite to his own heroic sentiments, from Ossian and other Scottish bards.

Wallace, to maintain his assumed character while the servants were removing the table, was tuning his harp when the Earl of Gloucester entered the room. The earl told Bruce the king had required the attendance of the border minstrel, desiring to hear "The Triumph," which had so much pleased the queen. Bruce turned pale at this message, and was opening his mouth to utter a denial, when Wallace, who read in his countenance what he was going to say, immediately spoke: "If my Lord Bruce will grant permission, I should wish to comply with the King of England's request." "Minstrel!" replied Bruce, casting on him a powerful expression of what was passing in his mind; "you know not, perhaps, that the King of England is at enmity with me, and cannot mean well to any one who has been my guest or servant! The Earl of Gloucester will excuse your attendance in the presence."

"Not for my life or the minstrel's!" replied the earl; "the king would suspect some mystery, and this innocent man might fall into peril. But, as it is, his majesty merely wishes to hear him play and sing, and I pledge myself he shall return in safety."

Further opposition would only have courted danger, and with as good a grace as he could assume, Bruce gave his consent. A page who followed Gloucester took up the harp, and with a glance at his friend, which spoke the fearless mind with which he ventured into the power of his enemy, Wallace accompanied Gloucester out of the room.

The earl moved swiftly forward, and leading him through a double line of guards, the folding doors of the royal apartment were thrown open by two knights in waiting, and Wallace

found himself in the presence. Perforated with the wounds which the chief's own hand had given him, the king lay upon a couch overhung with a crimson velvet canopy, with long golden fringes which swept the floor. His crown stood on a cushion at his head, and his queen, the blooming Margaret of France, sat full of smiles at his feet. The young Countess of Gloucester occupied a seat by her side.

The countess, who had not been at court the preceding day, fixed her eyes on the minstrel as he advanced into the middle of the room where the page planted the harp. She observed the manner of his obeisance to the king and queen, and to herself, and the queen whispering her with a smile, said, "Have your British troubadours usually such an air as that? Am I right, or am I wrong?" "Quite right," replied the countess in as low a voice: "I suppose he has sung of kings and heroes till he cannot help assuming their step and demeanour!" "But how did he come by those eyes!" answered the queen: "If singing of Reuther's 'beamy gaze' have so richly endowed his own, by getting him to teach me his art I may warble myself into a complexion as fair as any northern beauty!" "But then his must not be the subject of your song," whispered the countess with a laugh, "for methinks it is rather of the Ethiop hue!"

During this short dialogue, Edward was speaking with Gloucester, and Wallace leaned upon his harp.

"That is enough," said the king to his son-in-law; "now let me hear him play."

The earl gave the word, and Wallace, striking the chords with the master hand of genius, called forth such strains and uttered such tones from his full and richly-modulated voice, that the king listened with wonder, and the queen and countess scarcely allowed themselves to breathe. He sung the parting of Reuther and his bride, and their souls seemed to pant upon his notes; he changed his measure, and their bosoms heaved with the enthusiasm which spoke from his lips and hand, for he urged the hero to battle, he described the conflict, he mourned the slain, he sung the glorious triumph: as the last sweep of the harp rolled on the ear of the king, the monarch deigned to pronounce him unequalled in his art. Excess of delight so agitated the ladies that they wiped the glistening tears from their cheeks. The queen approached him, laid her hand upon the harp, and touching the strings with a light

finger, said with a sweet smile—"You must remain with the king's musicians, and teach me how to charm as you do!" Wallace replied to this innocent speech with a smile as sweet as her own, and bowed.

The countess drew near. Though not much older than the youthful queen she had been married twice, and being therefore more acquainted with the proprieties of life, her compliments were uttered in a form more befitting her rank and the supposed quality of the man to whom the queen continued to pour forth her less considerate praises.

Edward desired Gloucester to bring the minstrel closer to him. Wallace approached the royal couch. Edward looked at him from head to foot before he spoke.

"Who are you?" at length demanded Edward, who, surprised at the noble mien and unabashed carriage of the minstrel, conceived some suspicions of his quality. Wallace saw what was passing in the king's mind, and, determining by a frank reply to uproot his doubts, mildly but fearlessly answered, "A Scot." "Indeed!" said the king, satisfied that no incendiary would dare thus to proclaim himself. "And how durst you, being of that outlawed nation, venture into my court? Feared you not to fall a sacrifice to my indignation against the mad leader of your rebellious countrymen?" "I fear nothing on earth," replied Wallace. "This garb is privileged; none who respect that sacred law dare commit violence on a minstrel, and against them who regard no law but that of their own wills I have this weapon to defend me." As Wallace spoke, he pointed to a dirk which stuck in his girdle. "You are a bold man, and an honest man, I believe," replied the king; "and as my queen desires it, I order your enrolment in my travelling train of musicians. You may leave the presence."

"Then follow me to my apartment," cried the queen; "countess, you will accompany me to see me take my first lesson."

A page took up the harp; and Wallace, bowing his head to the king, was conducted by Gloucester to the ante-room of the queen's apartments. The earl there told him that when dismissed by the queen, a page should show him the way back to Lord Carrick.

The royal Margaret herself opened the door, so eager was she to admit her teacher; and placing herself at the harp, she attempted a passage of "The Triumph" which had par-

ticularly struck her, but she played wrong. Wallace was asked to set her right; he obeyed. She was quick—he clear in his explanations; and in less than half-an-hour he made her execute the whole movement in a manner that delighted her. “Why, minstrel,” cried she, looking up in his face, “either your harp is enchanted, or you are a magician. I have studied three long years to play the lute, and could never bring forth any tone that did not make me ready to stop my own ears. And now, countess,” cried she, again touching a few chords, “did you ever hear anything so entrancing?”

“I suppose,” returned the countess, “all your former instructors have been novices, and this Scot alone knows the art to which they pretended.” “Do you hear what the countess says?” exclaimed the queen, affecting to whisper him; “she will not allow of any spiritual agency in my wonderfully awakened talent. If you can contradict her, do, for I want very much to believe in fairies, magicians, and all the enchanting world!”

Wallace, with a respectful smile, answered, “I know of no spirit that has interposed in your majesty’s favour but that of your own genius; and it is more efficient than the agency of all fairy land.” The queen looked at him very gravely, and said, “If you really think there are no such things as fairies and enchantments, then everybody in your country must have genius, for they seem to be excellent in everything. Your warriors are so peerlessly brave—all, excepting those Scottish lords who are such favourites with the king. I wonder what he can see in their uncouth faces, or find in their rough conversation to admire. If it had not been for their besetting my gracious Edward I am sure he would never have suspected any ill of the noble Bruce!” “Queen Margaret,” cried the Countess of Gloucester, giving her a look of respectful reprehension; “had not the minstrel better retire?” The queen blushed, and recollected that she was giving too free a vent to her sentiments, but she would not suffer Wallace to withdraw.

“I have yet to ask you,” resumed she—“the warriors of Scotland being so resistless, and their minstrels so perfect in their art, whether all the ladies can be so very beautiful as the Lady Helen Mar?”

The eagerness with which Wallace grasped at any tidings of her, who was so prime an object of his enterprise, at once disturbed the composure of his air; and, had the penetrating

eyes of the countess been then directed towards him, she might have drawn some dangerous conclusions from the start he gave at the mention of her name. "But perhaps you have never seen her?" added the queen. Wallace replied, neither denying nor affirming her question; "I have heard many praise her beauty, but more her virtues." "Well, I am sorry," continued her majesty, "since you sing so sweetly of female charms, that you have not seen this wonder of Scottish ladies. You have now little chance of that good fortune, for Earl de Valence has taken her abroad, intending to marry her amidst all the state with which my lord has invested him." "Is it to Guienne he has taken her?" inquired Wallace. "Yes," replied the queen, rather pleased than offended at the minstrel's ignorance of court ceremony in thus familiarly presuming to put a question to her; "while so near Scotland he could not win her to forget her native country and her father's danger, who, it seems, was dying when De Valence carried her away. And to prevent bloodshed between the earl and Soulis, who is also madly in love with her, my ever-gracious Edward gave the English lord a high post in Guienne, and thither they are gone."

Before Wallace could reply to some remark which the queen laughingly added to her information, the countess thought it proper to give her gay mother-in-law a more decisive reminder of decorum, and rising, she whispered something which covered the youthful Margaret with blushes. Her majesty rose directly, and pushing away the harp, hurriedly said, "You may leave the room"; and turning her back to Wallace, walked away through an opposite door.

CHAPTER LV.

THE CASTLE.

WALLACE was yet recounting the particulars of his royal visit to Bruce (who had anxiously watched his return), when one of the queen's attendants appeared, and presenting him a silk handkerchief curiously coiled up, said that he brought it from her majesty, who supposed it must be his, as she found it in the room where he had been playing the harp. Wallace was going to say that it did not belong to him, when Bruce gave him a look that directed him to take the handkerchief. He obeyed without a word, and the boy withdrew.

Bruce smiled : " There is more in that handkerchief than silk, my friend ! Queens send not these embassies on trifling errands." While Bruce spoke, Wallace unwrapped it. " I told you so ! " cried the prince, pointing to a slip of vellum, which became unfolded. " Shall I look aside while you peruse it ? " Look on it, my dear prince," replied Wallace, " for in trifles, as well as in things of moment, I would hold no reserve with you." The vellum was then opened, and these words presented themselves :—

" Presume not on condescension. This injunction may be necessary, for the noble lady who was present at our interview tells me the men of this island are very presuming. Redeem the character of your countrymen, and transgress not on a courtesy that only means to say, I did not leave you this morning so abruptly out of unkindness. I write this because having the countess ever with me, I shall not even dare to whisper it in her presence. Be always faithful and respectful, minstrel, and you shall ever find an indulgent mistress. A page will call for you when your attendance is desired."

Wallace and Bruce looked on each other. Bruce spoke first—" Had you vanity, my friend, this letter might be a gratification ; but in our case the sentiment it breathes is full of danger. She knows not the secret power that impelled her to write this, but we do ; and I fear it will point an attention to you which may produce effects ruinous to our projects." " Then," answered Wallace, " our alternative is to escape by getting away this very night. And, as you persevere in your resolution not to enter Scotland unaccompanied by me, and will share my attempt to rescue Lady Helen Mar, we must direct our course immediately to the continent."

" Yes, instantly, and securely, too, under the disguise of priests ! " returned Bruce ; " I have in my possession the wardrobe of the confessor who followed my father's fortunes, and who, on his death, retired into the abbey which contains his remains."

It was then settled that when it became dark they should dress themselves in the confessor's robes, and by means of the queen's signet, which she had given to Wallace at the banquet, pass the guard as priests who had entered by some other gate, and were returned from shriving her majesty. Once without the city, they could make to the nearest seaport, and there embark for France, for they were well aware that the moment

they were missed suspicion would direct pursuit towards the Scottish borders.

In these arrangements, and in planning their future movements relative to the rescue of Lady Helen, they passed several hours, and were only interrupted by the arrival of a lute from the queen for her minstrel to tune. Wallace obeyed, and then continuing his discourse with Bruce, time moved on, till the shadows of evening deepened into night.

"Now is our hour!" cried Bruce, starting on his feet; "go you into that room and array yourself in the confessor's robes, while I call my servant to dispense with their usual nightly attendance." With determination and hope, Wallace gladly obeyed. In that very same instant the Earl of Gloucester suddenly entered; and, looking round the room with a disturbed countenance, abruptly said, "Where is the minstrel?" "Why?" answered Bruce, with an alarm which he vainly tried to prevent appearing in his face. Gloucester advanced close to him: "Is any one within hearing?" "No one." "Then," replied the earl, "his life is in danger. He is suspected to be not what he seems, and, I am sorry to add, to stand in a favour with the queen, of a nature to incur his mortal punishment."

Bruce was so confounded with the stoppage of all their plans, and at the imminent peril of Wallace, that he could not speak. Gloucester proceeded: "My dear Bruce, from the circumstance of his being with you, I cannot but suppose that you know more of him than you think proper to disclose. Whoever he may be, whether he came from France or really from Scotland, as he says, his life is now forfeited. And that by attempting to screen him, you may not seem to share his imputed guilt, I come to warn you of this discovery. A double guard is set around the keep, so no visible means are left for his escape."

"Then what will become of him?" exclaimed Bruce, forgetting all caution in dismay of his friend. "Am I to see the bravest of men, the saviour of my country, butchered before my eyes by a tyrant? I may die, Gloucester, in his defence, but I will never surrender him to his enemy!"

Gloucester stood aghast at this disclosure. He came to accuse the friend of Bruce, that Bruce might be prepared to clear himself of connivance with so treasonable a crime, but now that he found this friend to be Wallace, the preserver of

his own life, the restorer of his honour at Berwick, he immediately resolved to give him freedom. "Bruce," cried he, "when I recollect the figure and deportment of this minstrel, I am surprised that, despite his disguise, I did not recognise the regent of Scotland; but now I know him, he shall find that generosity is not confined to his own breast. Give me your word that you will not stimulate suspicion by remonstrating with Edward against your own arrest till the court leaves Durham, and I will instantly find a way to conduct your friend in safety from the castle." "I pledge you my word of honour," cried Bruce; "release him, and if you demand it, I would die in chains." "He saved me at Berwick," replied Gloucester, "and I am anxious to repay the debt. If he be near, explain what has happened in as few words as possible, for we must not delay a moment. I left a council with the enraged king, settling what horrible death was to be his punishment." "When he is safe," answered Bruce, "I will attest his innocence to you; meanwhile, rely on my faith, that you are giving liberty to a guiltless man."

Bruce hastened to Wallace, who had just completed his disguise. He briefly related what had passed, and received for answer that he would not leave his prince to the revenge of the tyrant. But Bruce, urging that the escape of the one could alone secure that of the other, implored him not to persist in refusing his offered safety, but to make direct for Normandy. "I will join you at Rouen, and thence we can proceed to Guienne," added he. "The hour the court leaves Durham is that of my escape; and when free, what shall divide me from you and our enterprise!"

Wallace had hardly assented, when a tumultuous noise broke the silence of the courtyard; the iron doors of the keep were thrown back, and the clangour of arms, with many voices, resounded in the hall. Thinking all was lost, Bruce drew his sword, and threw himself before his friend. At that instant Gloucester entered the room. "They are quicker than I thought," cried he; "but follow me. Bruce, remain where you are, sheath your sword—be bold; deny you know anything of the minstrel, and all will be well." As he spoke the feet of them who were come to seize Wallace already sounded in the adjoining apartment. Gloucester grasped the Scottish hero by the hand, turned into a gallery, and, plucking the broad shaft of a cedar pilaster from under its capital, let

himself and his companion into a passage within the wall of the building. The ponderous beam closed after them, and the pair descended, by a long flight of stone steps, to a square dungeon without any visible outlet, but the earl found one by raising a flat stone marked by a cross; and again they penetrated lower into the bosom of the earth by a gradually declining path till they stopped on a subterranean level ground. "This passage," said Gloucester, "reaches in a direct line to Fincklay Abbey. A particular circumstance constrained my uncle, then abbot of that monastery, to discover it to me ten years ago. He told me that to none but to the Bishops of Durham and the abbots of Fincklay was the secret of its existence revealed. Since my coming hither this time I one day took it into my head to revisit this recess, and found all as I had left it in my uncle's lifetime. But for the sake of my honour with Edward I must enjoin you to secrecy. Though the enemy of my king, you are the friend of mankind. You were my benefactor, Wallace, and I should deserve the rack could I suffer one hair of your head to fall with violence to the ground."

Wallace declared his sense of the earl's generosity, and earnestly commended Bruce to his watchful friendship. "The impetuosity of his mind," continued he, "at times may overthrow his prudence, and leave him exposed to dangers which a little caution might avoid. Dissimulation is a baseness I should shudder at seeing him practice; but when the flood of indignation swells his bosom, then tell him that I conjure him, *on the life of his dearest wishes, to be silent!* The storm which threatens must blow over, and we shall meet again!"

Gloucester then informed Wallace that about two hours before he was summoned by Edward to attend him immediately. When he obeyed, he found Soulis standing by the royal couch, and his majesty talking with violence. At sight of Gloucester he beckoned him to advance, and striking his hand fiercely on a letter he held, he exclaimed, "Here, my son, behold the record of a king of England dishonoured by a slave!" As he spoke he dashed it from him. Soulis answered, smiling, "Not a slave, my lord and king, can you not see through the ill-adapted disguise the figure and mien of nobility? He is some foreign lover of your bride, come——" "Enough," interrupted the king, "I know I am dishonoured, but the villain shall die. Read the letter, Gloucester, and say what tortures shall stamp my vengeance!"

Gloucester opened the vellum and read, in the queen's hand :—

“Gentle minstrel ! my lady countess tells me I must not see you again. Were you old or ugly, as most bards are, I might, she says, but being young, it is not for a queen to smile upon one of your calling. She bade me remember, that when I smiled, you smiled too, and that you asked me questions unbecoming your degree. Pray do not do this any more ; though I see no harm in it : alas ! I used to smile as I liked when I was in France. Oh ! if it were not for those I love best, who are now in England, I wish I were there again ! and you would go with me, gentle minstrel, would you not ? And you would teach me to sing so sweetly ! I would then never talk with you, but always speak in song : how pretty that would be, and then we should be from under the eyes of this harsh countess. My ladies in France would let you come in and stay as long with me as I pleased. But as I cannot go back again, I will make myself happy in spite of the countess, who rules me more as if she were my stepmother than I hers ; but then, to be sure, she is a few years older.

“I will see you this evening, and your sweet harp shall sing all my heart-aches to sleep. My French lady of honour will conduct you secretly to my apartments. I am sure you are too honest even to guess at what the countess thinks you might fancy when I smile on you. But, gentle minstrel, presume not, and you shall ever find an indulgent mistress in M——.

“P.S. At the last vespers to-night, my page shall come for you.”

Gloucester knew the queen's handwriting, and not being able to contradict that this letter was hers, he inquired how it came into his majesty's hands. “I found it,” replied Soulis, “in crossing the court-yard ; it lay on the ground, where, doubtless, it had been accidentally dropped by the queen's messenger.”

Gloucester, wishing to extenuate for the queen's sake, whose youth and inexperience he pitied, affirmed that, from the simplicity with which the note was written, from her innocent references to the minstrel's profession, he could not suppose that she addressed him in any other character.

“If he be only a base itinerant harper,” replied the king, “the deeper is my disgrace : for if a passion of another kind than music be not portrayed in every word of this letter, I

never read a woman's heart ! ” The king continued to comment on the fatal scroll with the lynx-eye of jealousy, loading her name with every opprobrium. Gloucester inwardly thanked heaven that none other than Soulis and himself were present to hear Edward fasten such foul dishonour on his queen. The generous earl could not find other arguments to assuage the mounting ire of her husband. She might be innocent of actual guilt, but certainly more than a queen's usual interest in a wandering minstrel was evident in every line. Gloucester remained silent ; Edward believed him convinced of the queen's crime, and too wrathful to think of caution, he sent for the bishops and others of his lords, and when they entered vented to them also his injury and indignation. Many were not inclined to be of the same opinion with their sovereign ; some thought with Gloucester, others deemed the letter altogether a forgery, and a few adopted the severer inferences of her husband, but all united in recommending an immediate apprehension and private execution of the minstrel. “ It is not fit,” cried Soulis, “ that a man who has even been suspected of invading our monarch's honour should live another hour.”

This sanguinary sentence was acceded to, and with as little remorse by the whole assembly as if they had merely condemned a tree to the axe. Such is the carelessness with which the generality of arbitrary assemblies decide on the fate of a fellow-mortal ! Earl Percy, who gave his vote for the death of the minstrel, more from this culpable inconsideration than that thirst of blood which stimulated Soulis and the Cummins, proposed, as he believed the queen innocent, that to clear her, the Countess of Gloucester and the French lady of honour should be examined relative to the circumstance mentioned in the letter.

The king immediately ordered their attendance.

The royal Jane of Acre appeared at the first summons, and spoke with an air of truth and freedom from alarm which convinced every candid ear of the innocence of the queen. Her testimony was, that she believed the minstrel to be other than he seemed ; but she was certain, from the conversation which the queen had held with her after the bishop's feast, that it was in this very feast she had first seen him, and that she was ignorant of his real rank. Questioned by the bishop, the countess acknowledged that her majesty had praised his figure as well as his singing ; “ yet not more,” added she, “ than she afterwards did to the king when she awakened his curiosity

to send for him." Her highness continued to reply to the interrogatories put to her by saying that it was in the king's presence she herself first saw the minstrel; and then she thought his demeanour much above his situation; but, when he accompanied the queen and herself into her majesty's apartments, she had then an opportunity to observe him narrowly, and became convinced he was not what he appeared.

"And why?" asked the king, "did you not impart these suspicions to your husband or to me?" "Because," replied she, "remembering that my interference on a certain public occasion brought my late husband, Clare, under your majesty's displeasure, on my marriage with Monthermer I made a solemn vow before my confessor never to offend in the like manner. And, besides, the countenance of this stranger was so ingenuous, and his sentiments so natural and honourable, I could not suspect he came on any disloyal errand."

"Lady," observed one of the elder lords, "if you thought so well of the queen and of this man, why did you caution her against his smiles, and deem it necessary to persuade her not to see him again?"

The countess blushed at this question, but replied, "Because I saw the minstrel was a gentleman. He possessed a noble figure, and a handsome face in spite of his Egyptian skin. Like most young gentlemen, he might be conscious of these advantages, and attribute the artless approbation of my gracious queen, to a source more flattering to his vanity. I have known many lords, not far from your majesty, make similar mistakes on as little grounds," added she, looking disdainfully towards the younger nobles; "and, therefore, to prevent such insolence, I desired his final dismissal."

"Thank you, my dear Jane," replied the king; "you almost persuade me of Margaret's innocence." "Believe it, sire," cried she with animation; "whatever romantic thoughtlessness her youth and inexperience may have led her into, I pledge my life on her purity."

"First, let us hear what that French woman has to say to the assignation," exclaimed Soulis; "question her, and then her majesty may have full acquittal!"

Again the brow of Edward was overcast. The fiends of jealousy once more tugged at his heart, and ordering the Countess of Gloucester to withdraw, he commanded the Baroness de Pontoise to be brought into the presence.

When she saw the king's threatening looks, and beheld the fearful expression which shot from every surrounding countenance, she shrunk with terror. Long hackneyed in secret gallantries, the same inward whisper which had proclaimed to Soulis that the queen was guilty, induced her to believe that she had been the confidante of an illicit passion ; and therefore, though she knew nothing really bad of her unhappy mistress, yet fancying that she did, she stood with the air and aspect of a culprit.

"Repeat to me," demanded the king, "or answer it with your head, all that you know of Queen Margaret's intimacy with the man who calls himself a minstrel."

At these words, which were delivered in a tone that seemed the sentence of death, the French woman fell on her knees, and in a burst of terror exclaimed, "Sire, I will reveal all if your majesty will grant me a pardon for having too faithfully served my mistress !"

"Speak ! speak !" cried the king, with desperate impatience. "I swear to pardon you, even if you have joined in a conspiracy against my life ; but speak the truth, and all the truth, that judgment, without mercy, may fall on the guilty head."

"Then I obey," answered the baroness. "The only time I ever heard of, or saw this man to my knowledge, was when he was brought to play before my lady at the bishop's banquet. I did not much observe him, so I cannot say whether I might not have seen him in France, for many noble lords adored the Princess Margaret, though she appeared to frown upon them all. But I must confess, when I attended her majesty's disrobing after the feast, she put to me so many questions about what I thought of the minstrel who had sung so divinely that I began to think her admiration too great to have been awakened by a mere song. And then she asked me if a king could have a nobler air than he had ; and she laughed, and said she would send your majesty to school to learn of him."

"Damnable traitress !" exclaimed the king. The baroness paused, and retreated from before the sudden fury which flashed from his eyes. "Go on," cried he ; "hide neither word nor circumstance, that my vengeance may lose nothing of its aim !"

She proceeded :—"Her majesty then talked of his beautiful eyes ; so blue, she said, so tender, yet proud in their looks ; and only a minstrel ! 'De Pontoise,' added she, 'can you

explain that ?' I being rather, perhaps, too well learned in the idle tales of our troubadours, heedlessly answered, ' Perhaps he is some king in disguise, just come to look at your majesty's charms, and go away again !' She laughed much at this conceit ; said he must be one of Pharaoh's race then, and that had he not such white teeth, his complexion would be intolerable. Being pleased to see her majesty in such spirits, and thinking no ill, I answered, ' I read once of a certain Spanish lover who went to the court of Tunis to carry off the king's daughter, and he had so black a face that none suspected him to be other than the Moorish prince of Granada ; when lo ! one day, in a pleasure party on the sea, he fell overboard, and came up with the fairest face in the world, and presently acknowledged himself to be the Christian king of Castile !' The queen laughed at this story, but not answering me, went to bed. Next morning, when I entered her chamber, she received me with even more gaiety, and putting aside my coiffure, said, ' Let me see if I can find the devil's mark here !' ' What is the matter ?' I asked : ' does your majesty take me for a witch ?' ' Exactly so,' she replied ; ' for a little sprite told me last night that all you said was true.' And then she began to tell me that she had dreamt the minstrel was the very prince of Portugal, whom, unseen, she had refused for the King of England, and that he gave her a harp set with jewels. She then went to your majesty, and I saw no more of her till she sent for me late in the evening. She seemed very angry. ' You are faithful,' said she to me, ' and you know me, De Pontoise, you know me too proud to degrade myself, and too high-minded to submit to tyranny. The Countess of Gloucester, with persuasions too like commands, will not allow me to see the minstrel any more.' She then declared her determination that she would see him ; that she would feign herself sick, and he should come and sing to her when she was alone ; and that she was sure he was too modest to presume on her condescension. I said something to dissuade her, but she overruled me, and I consented to assist her. She embraced me and gave me a letter to convey to him, which I did, by slipping it beneath the ornaments of the handle of her lute, which I sent as an excuse for the minstrel to tune. It was to acquaint him with her intentions, and this night he was to have visited her apartments."

During this recital the king sat with compressed lips, listen-

ing, but with a countenance proclaiming the collecting tempest within. On mentioning the letter, he clenched his hand as if then he grasped the thunderbolt. The lords immediately apprehended that this was the letter which Soulis found.

"And is this all you know of the affair?" inquired Percy, seeing that she made a pause. "And enough, too," cried Soulis, "to blast the most vaunted chastity in Christendom."

"Take the woman hence!" cried the king, in a burst of wrath. "Never let me see her traitor face again!" The baroness withdrew in terror; and Edward, calling Sir Piers Gaveston, commanded him to place himself at the head of a double guard, and to go in person to bring the object of his officious introduction to meet the punishment due to his crime. "For," cried the king, "be he prince or peasant, I will see him hanged before my eyes, and then return his wanton paramour, branded with infamy, to her disgraced family!"

Soulis now suggested that, as the delinquent was to be found with Bruce, most likely that young nobleman was privy to his designs. "We shall see to him hereafter," replied the king; "meanwhile, look that I am obeyed."

The moment this order passed the king's lips, Gloucester hastened to warn Bruce of what had occurred, that he might separate himself from the crime of a man who appeared to have been under his protection. But when he found that the accused was no other than Wallace, all other considerations were lost in the desire of delivering him from the impending danger. He knew the means, and he did not hesitate to employ them.

During this discourse they passed on through the vaulted passage, till, arriving at a wooden crucifix which marked the boundary of the domain of Durham, Gloucester stopped. "I must not go further. Should I prolong my stay from the castle during the search for you, suspicion may be awakened. You must proceed alone. Go straight forward, and at the extremity of the vault you will find a flag-stone marked like the one by which we descended, raise it, and it will let you into the cemetery of the abbey of Fincklay. Thence you will emerge to the open world; and may it in future, noble Wallace, ever treat you according to your unequalled merits. Farewell!"

The earl turned to retrace his steps, and Wallace pursued his way through the darkness towards the Fincklay extremity of the vault.

CHAPTER LVI.

GALLIC SEAS.

WALLACE made direct to Sunderland, where he arrived about sunrise. A vessel belonging to France rode there, waiting a favourable wind. Wallace secured a passage in her, and, going on board, wrote a letter to Edward. It ran thus :—

“ This testament is to assure Edward, King of England, upon the word of a knight, that Queen Margaret, his wife, is in every respect guiltless of the crimes alleged against her by the Lord Soulis and sworn to by the Baroness de Pontoise. I came to the court of Durham on an errand connected with my country ; and, that I might be unknown, I assumed the disguise of a minstrel. By accident I encountered Sir Piers Gaveston, and, ignorant that I was other than I seemed, he introduced me at the royal banquet. It was there I first saw her majesty ; and I never had that honour but three times. One I have named, the second was in your royal presence, and the third and last in her apartments, to which your majesty’s self saw me withdraw. The Countess of Gloucester was present the whole time, and to her highness I appeal. The queen saw in me only a minstrel ; on my art alone as a musician was her favour bestowed, and by expressing it with an ingenuous warmth which none other than an innocent heart would have dared to display, she has thus exposed herself to the animadversions of libertinism, and to the false representations of a terror-struck, because worthless, friend.

“ I have escaped the snare which the queen’s enemies laid for me ; and for her sake, for the sake of truth, and your own peace, King Edward, I declare before the Searcher of all hearts, and before the world, in whose esteem I hope to live and die—that your wife is innocent ! And should I ever meet the man who, after this declaration, dares to unite her name with mine in a tale of infamy—by the power of truth, I swear that I will make him write a recantation with his blood. Pure as a virgin’s chastity is, and shall ever be, the honour of William Wallace.”

This letter was enclosed in one to the Earl of Gloucester, and having despatched his packet, the Scottish chief gladly saw a brisk wind blow up from the north-west. The ship weighed anchor, and, under a fair sky, swiftly cut the waves towards the Gallic shores. But ere she reached them, the warlike star

of Wallace directed to his little bark the terrific sails of the Red Reaver, a formidable pirate who then infested the Gallic seas. He attacked the French vessel, but it carried a greater than Cæsar and his fortunes : Wallace and his destiny were there, and the enemy struck to the Scottish chief. The Red Reaver was killed in the action ; but his younger brother, Thomas de Longueville, was found alive within the captive ship, and yet a greater prize ! Prince Louis of France, who, having been out the day before on a sailing party, had been seized by the Red Reaver.

Adverse winds for some time prevented Wallace from reaching port, but on the fourth day after the victory he cast anchor in the harbour of Havre. The indisposition of the prince from a wound he had received in his own conflict with the Reaver made it necessary to apprise King Philip of the accident. In answer to Wallace's despatches on this subject, the grateful monarch added to the proffers of personal friendship, which had been the substance of his majesty's embassy to Scotland, a pressing invitation that the Scottish chief would accompany the prince to Paris, and there receive a public mark of royal gratitude which should record this service done to France to future ages. Meanwhile Philip sent the chief a suit of armour, with a request that he would wear it in remembrance of France and his own heroism. But nothing could tempt Wallace to turn aside from his duty. Impatient to pursue his journey towards the spot where he hoped to meet Bruce, he wrote a respectful excuse to the king, but arraying himself in the monarch's present (to assure his majesty by the evidence of his son that his royal wish had been so far obeyed), he went to the prince to bid him farewell. Wallace gave his highness a packet for the king, containing a statement of his vow to Lord Mar, and a promise, that when he had fulfilled it, Philip should see him at Paris. The royal cavalcade then separated from the deliverer of its prince ; and Wallace, mounting a richly-barbed Arabian, which had accompanied his splendid armour, took the road to Rouen.

Meanwhile, events not less momentous took place at Durham. The instant Wallace had followed the Earl of Gloucester from the apartment in the castle, it was entered by Sir Piers Gaveston. He demanded the minstrel. Bruce replied he knew not where he was. Gaveston, eager to convince the king that he was no accomplice with the suspected person, put

the question a second time, and in a tone which he meant should intimidate the Scottish prince—"Where is the minstrel?" "I know not," replied Bruce. "And will you dare to tell me," asked his interrogator, "that within this quarter of an hour he has not been in this tower—nay, in this very room? The guards in your antechamber have told me that he was: and can Lord Carrick stoop to utter a falsehood to screen a wandering beggar?"

While he was speaking, Bruce stood eyeing him with increasing scorn. Gaveston paused. "You expect me to answer you," said the prince. "Out of respect to myself I will. Gaveston, you have known me five years; two of them we passed together in the jousts of Flanders, and yet you believe me capable of falsehood! Know, then, that neither to save mean nor great would I deviate from the strict line of truth. The man you seek may have been in this tower, in this room, as you at present are, and as little am I bound to know where he now is, as whither you go when you relieve me from an inquisition which I hold myself accountable to no man to answer." "'Tis well," cried Gaveston; "and I am to carry this haughty message to the king?" "If you deliver it as a message," answered Bruce, "you will prove that they who are ready to suspect falsehood find its utterance easy. My reply is to you. When King Edward speaks to me I shall find the answer that is due to him." "These attempts to provoke me into a private quarrel," cried Gaveston, "will not succeed. I am not to be so foiled in my duty. I must seek the man through your apartments." "By whose authority?" demanded Bruce. "By my own, as the loyal subject of my outraged monarch. He bade me bring the traitor before him, and thus I obey." While speaking, Gaveston beckoned to his attendants to follow him to the door whence Wallace had disappeared. Bruce threw himself before it. "I must forget the duty I owe to myself before I allow you or any other man to invade my privacy. I have already given you the answer that becomes Robert Bruce; and in respect to your knighthood, instead of compelling, I request you to withdraw." Gaveston hesitated, but he knew the determined character of his opponent, and therefore, with no very good grace, muttering that he should hear of it from a more powerful quarter, he left the room.

And certainly his threats were not in this instance vain, for

prompt was the arrival of a marshal and his officers to force Bruce before the king.

"Robert Bruce, Earl of Cleveland, Carrick, and Annandale, I come to summon you into the presence of your liege lord, Edward of England."

"The Earl of Cleveland obeys," replied Bruce; and with a fearless step he walked out before the marshal.

When he entered the presence-chamber, Sir Piers Gaveston stood beside the royal couch, as if prepared to be his accuser. The king sat supported by pillows, paler with the mortifications of jealousy and baffled authority, than from the effects of his wounds. "Robert Bruce," cried he, "are you not afraid thus to provoke your sovereign? Are you not afraid that I shall make that audacious head answer for the man whom you thus dare to screen from my just revenge?" Bruce felt all the injuries he had suffered from this proud king rush at once upon his memory, and, without changing his position or lowering his looks, he answered: "The judgment of a just king I cannot fear, the sentence of an unjust one I despise." "This to his majesty's face!" exclaimed Soulis. "Insolence—rebellion—chastisement—even death," were the words which murmured round the room at the honest reply. Edward had too much good sense to echo any one of them, but turning to Bruce with a sensation of shame he would gladly have repressed, he said, that in consideration of his youth he would pardon him what had passed, and reinstate him in all the late Earl of Carrick's honours, if he would immediately declare where he had hidden the offending minstrel. "I have not hidden him," cried Bruce, "nor do I know where he is; but had that been confided to me, as I know him to be an innocent man, no power on earth should have wrenched him from me!"

"Do you flatter yourself that he would trust such a novice as you are with secrets of this nature?" exclaimed Earl Buchan with a laugh of contempt. Bruce turned on him an eye of fire. "Buchan," replied he, "I will answer you on other ground. Meanwhile, remember that the secrets of good men are open to every virtuous heart; those of the wicked they would be glad to conceal from themselves."

"Robert Bruce," cried the king, "before I came this northern journey, I ever found you one of the most devoted of my servants, the gentlest youth in my court, and how do I see you at this moment? Braving my nobles to my face! How is it

that until now this spirit never broke forth ? ” “ Because,” answered the prince, “ until now I had never seen the virtuous friend whom you call upon me to betray.” “ Then you confess,” cried the king, “ that he was an instigator to rebellion ? ” “ I never knew what true loyalty was till he taught it me,” answered Bruce ; “ I never knew what virtue might be till he allowed me to see in himself incorruptible fidelity, bravery undaunted, and a purity of heart not to be contaminated ! And this is the man on whom these lords would fasten a charge of treason and adultery ! But out of the filthy depths of their own breasts arise the steams with which they would blacken his fairness.”

“ Your vindication,” cried the king, “ confirms his guilt. You admit that he is not a minstrel in reality. Wherefore, then, did he steal in ambuscade into my palace but to betray either my honour or my life, perhaps both ? ” “ His errand here was to see me.” “ Rash boy ! ” cried Edward ; “ then you acknowledge yourself a premeditated conspirator against me ? ” Soulis now whispered in the king’s ear, but so low that Bruce did not hear him. “ Penetrate further, my liege, this may be only a false confession to shield the queen’s character. She who has once betrayed her duty, finds it easy to reward such handsome advocates.” The scarlet of inextinguishable wrath now burnt on the face of Edward. “ I will confront them,” returned he ; “ surprise them into betraying each other.”

By his immediate orders the queen was brought in. She leaned on the Countess of Gloucester. “ Jane,” cried the king, “ leave that woman ; let her impudence sustain her ! ” “ Rather her innocence, my lord,” said the countess, bowing, and hesitating to obey. “ Leave her to that,” returned the incensed husband, “ and she would grovel on the earth like her own base passions. But stand before me she shall, and without other support than the devils within her.” “ For pity ! ” cried the queen, extending her clasped hands towards Edward, and bursting into tears ; “ have mercy on me, for I am innocent ! ” “ Prove it, then,” cried the king, “ by agreeing with this confidant of your minstrel, and at once tell me by what name you addressed him when you allured him to my court ? Is he French, Spanish, or English ? ” “ By the Virgin’s holy purity, I swear ! ” cried the queen, sinking on her knees, “ that I never allured him to this court ; I never beheld him

till I saw him at the bishop's banquet ; and for his name, I know it not." "Oh, vilest of the vile !" cried the king, fiercely grasping his couch, "and didst thou become a wanton at a glance ? From my sight this moment !"

The queen dropped senseless into the arms of the Earl of Gloucester, who at that moment entered from seeing Wallace through the cavern. At sight of him, Bruce knew that his friend was safe ; and, fearless for himself when the cause of outraged innocence was at stake, he suddenly exclaimed, "By one word, King Edward, I will confirm the blamelessness of this injured queen ! Listen to me, not as a monarch and an enemy, but with the unbiassed judgment of man with man, and then ask your own heart if it would be possible for Sir William Wallace to be a seducer."

Every mouth was dumb at the enunciation of that name. None dared open a lip in accusation ; the king himself, thunderstruck alike with the boldness of his conqueror venturing within the grasp of his revenge, and at the daring of Bruce in thus declaring his connection with him, for a few minutes knew not what to answer ; only he had received conviction of his wife's innocence ! He was too well acquainted with the history and uniform conduct of Wallace to doubt his honour in this transaction. "Bruce," said he, "your honesty has saved the Queen of England. Though Wallace is my enemy, I know him to be of an integrity which neither man nor woman can shake ; and therefore," added he, turning to the lords, "I declare before all who have heard me arraign my injured wife, that I believe her innocent of every offence against me. And whoever, after this, mentions one word of what has passed in these investigations, or even whispers that they have been held, shall be punished as guilty of high treason."

Bruce was then ordered to be reconducted to the round-tower ; and the rest of the lords, withdrawing by command, the king was left with Gloucester, his daughter Jane, and the now reviving queen, to make his peace with her, even on his knees.

Bruce was now more closely immured than ever. On the fourth day of his seclusion an extra row of iron bars was put across his windows. He asked the captain of the party the reason for this new rivet on his captivity. One of the warders replied, "He had best not ask questions, lest he should hear that his majesty had determined to keep him under Bishop

Beck's padlock for life." Bruce was not to be deprived of hope by a single evidence, and smiling, said, "There are more ways of getting out of a tyrant's prison than by the doors and windows!" "Why, you would not eat through the walls?" cried the man. "Certainly," replied Bruce, "if I have no other way, and through the guards too." "We'll see to that," answered the man. "And feel it too, my sturdy jailer," returned the prince; "so look to yourself." Bruce threw himself recklessly into a chair as he spoke, while the man, eyeing him askance, and remembering how strangely the minstrel had disappeared, began to think that some people born in Scotland inherited from nature a necromantic power of executing whatever they determined.

Though careless in his manner of treating the warder's information, Bruce thought of it with anxiety; and lost in reflection he remained where the man had left him till another sentinel brought in a lamp. Bruce then heard the bolts on the outside of the chamber pushed into their guards. "There they go," said he to himself; "and those are to be the morning and evening sounds to which I am to listen all my days! At least, Edward would have it so. Well, Edward, kindness might bind generous minds even to forget their rights, but, thanks to you, neither in my own person, nor for any of my name, do I owe you aught but to behold me King of Scotland; and, please God, that you shall."

While invocations to the Power in which he confided, and resolutions respecting the consequences of his hoped-for liberty, by turns occupied his mind, he heard the tread of a foot in the adjoining passage. He listened breathless, for no living creature, he thought, could be in that quarter of the building, as he had suffered none to enter it since Wallace had disappeared by that way. He half rose from his couch as the door at which he had seen him last gently opened. He started up, and Gloucester, with a lantern in his hand, stood before him. The earl put his finger on his lip, and, taking Bruce by the hand, led him, as he had done Wallace, down into the vault which leads to Fincklay Abbey.

When safe in that subterraneous cloister, the earl replied to the impatient gratitude of Bruce by giving him a succinct account of his motives for changing his first determination, and now giving him liberty. He had not visited Bruce since the escape of Wallace that he might not excite any new

suspicion in Edward, and the tower being fast locked at every usual avenue, he had now entered it from the Fincklay side. He then proceeded to inform Bruce that, after his magnanimous forgetfulness of his own safety to ensure that of the queen had produced a reconciliation between her and her husband, Buchan, Soulis, and Athol, with one or two English lords, joined next day to persuade the king that Bruce's avowal respecting Wallace had been merely an invention of his own to screen some baser friend and his royal mistress. They succeeded in re-awakening doubts in Edward, who, sending for Gloucester, said to him, "Unless I could hear from Wallace's own lips that he has been here, and that my wife is guiltless of this foul stain, I must ever remain in horrible suspense. These base Scots, ever fertile in maddening suggestions, have made me even suspect that Bruce had other reasons for his apparently generous risk of himself than a love of justice."

While these ideas floated in the mind of Edward, Bruce had been more closely immured; and Gloucester having received the promised letter from Wallace, determined to lay it before the king. Accordingly, one morning the earl, gliding unobserved into the presence-chamber before Edward was brought in, laid the letter under his majesty's cushion. As Gloucester expected, the moment the king saw the superscription, he knew the hand, and hastily breaking the seal, read the letter twice over to himself without speaking a word. But the clouds which had hung on his countenance all passed away, and with a smile, reaching the packet to Gloucester, he commanded him to read aloud "that silencer of all doubts respecting the honour of Margaret of France and England." Gloucester obeyed; and the astonished nobles, looking on each other, one and all assented to the credit that ought to be given to Wallace's word, and deeply regretted having ever joined in a suspicion against her majesty. Thus, then, all appeared amicably settled. But the embers of discord still glowed. The three Scottish lords, afraid lest Bruce might be again taken into favour, laboured to show that his friendship with Wallace pointed to his throwing off the English yoke, and independently assuming the Scottish crown. Edward required no arguments to convince him of the probability of this, and he readily complied with Bishop Beck's request to allow him to hold the royal youth his prisoner. But while the

Cummins won this victory over Bruce they gained nothing for themselves. During the king's vain enquiries respecting the manner in which Wallace's letter had been conveyed to the apartment, they had ventured to throw out hints of Bruce having been the agent, and that, however innocent the queen might be, he certainly evinced a more than usual interest in her person. These latter inuendoes the king crushed in the first whisper. "I have done enough with Robert Bruce," said he. "He is condemned a prisoner for life, and a mere suspicion shall never provoke me to give sentence for his death." Irritated by this reply, and the contemptuous glance with which it was accompanied, the vindictive triumvirate turned from the king to his court, and having failed in compassing the destruction of Bruce and his more renowned friend, they determined at least to make a wreck of their moral fame. The guilt of Wallace and the queen, and the participation of Bruce, was now whispered through every circle, and credited in proportion to the evil disposition of the hearers.

One of his pages at last brought to the ears of the king the stories which these lords so busily circulated; and sending for them, he gave them so severe a reprimand that, retiring from his presence with stifled wrath, they agreed to accept the invitation of young Lord Badenoch, return to their country, and support him in the regency. Next morning, Edward was informed they had secretly left Durham; and fearing that Bruce might also make his escape, a consultation was held between the king and Beck of so threatening a complexion that Gloucester no longer hesitated to run all risks, but immediately to give the Scottish prince his liberty.

Having led him in safety through the vaulted passage, they parted in the cemetery of Fincklay; Gloucester to walk back to Durham by the banks of the Wear, and Bruce to mount the horse the good earl had left tied to a tree, to convey him to Hartlepool. There he embarked for Normandy.

When he arrived at Caen he made no delay, but taking a rapid course across the country towards Rouen, on the second evening of his travelling, having pursued his route without sleep, he felt himself so overcome with fatigue that, in the midst of a vast and dreary plain, he found it necessary to stop for rest at the first habitation he might find. It happened to be the abode of one of those poor but pious matrons, who,

attaching themselves to some neighbouring order of charity, live alone in desert places for the purpose of succouring distressed travellers. Here Bruce found the widow's cruse, and a pallet to repose his wearied limbs.

CHAPTER LVII.

NORMANDY.

WALLACE, having separated from the prince royal of France, pursued his solitary way towards the capital of Normandy till night overtook him. Clouds so obscured the sky that not a star was visible, and his horse, terrified at the darkness, and the difficulties of the path, suddenly stopped. On which side lay the road to Rouen Wallace could form no guess. To pass the night in so exposed a spot might be dangerous, and he determined to push onward.

He had ridden nearly another hour when the silence was broken by the roll of distant thunder. Then forked lightning shooting from the horizon, showed a line of country unmarked by any vestige of human habitation. The storm approached, till, breaking in peals over his head, it discharged such sheets of fire that the horse reared, and plunging amidst the blaze flashed the light of its rider's armour on the eyes of a troop of horsemen, who also stood under the tempest, gazing with affright at the scene. Wallace, by the same transitory illumination, saw the travellers, as they seemed to start back at his appearance, and, mistaking their apprehension, he called to them that his steed would do theirs no harm. One of them advanced, and respectfully inquired of him the way to Rouen. Wallace replied that he was a stranger in this part of the country, and was also seeking that city. While he was yet speaking, the thunder and lightning became so tremendous that the horses of the troop became restive, and one of them threw its rider. Wallace rode towards the spot and asked the nearest bystander (for several had alighted) whether the unfortunate man was much hurt. The answer returned was full of alarm for the sufferer, and anxiety to obtain some place of shelter, for rain began to fall. In a few minutes it increased to torrents, and the lightning ceasing, deepened the horrors of the scene by preventing the likelihood of discovering any human abode. The men gathered round their fallen companion, bemoaning the prospect, but Wallace cheered them

by saying he would seek a shelter for their friend, and blow his bugle when he had found one. With the word he turned his horse, and as he galloped along called loudly on any Christian man who might live near to open his doors to a dying traveller! After riding about in all directions, he saw a glimmering light for a moment, and then all was darkness: but again he called aloud for charity! and a shrill voice answered, "I am a lone woman, with already one poor traveller in my house, but, for the Virgin's sake, I will open my door to you, whatever you may be." The good woman relit her lamp, which the rain had extinguished; and, on her unlatching the door, Wallace briefly related what had happened, entreating her permission to bring the unfortunate person into the cottage. She readily consented, and, giving him a lantern to guide his way, he blew his bugle, which was instantly answered by so glad and loud a shout that it assured him his companions could not be far distant, and that he must have made many a useless circuit before he had stopped at this charitable door.

The men directed him through the darkness by their voices, and by his assistance the bruised traveller was brought to the cottage. It was a poor hovel; but the good woman had spread a woollen coverlet over her own bed in the inner chamber, and thither Wallace carried the invalid. He seemed in great pain, but his kind conductor answered his hostess's inquiries respecting him, with a belief that no bones were broken. "But yet," cried she, "sad may be the effects of internal bruises on so emaciated a frame. I will venture to disturb my other guest, who sleeps in the loft, and bring down a decoction that I keep there. It is made from simple herbs, and I am sure will be of service."

The old woman having showed to the attendants where they might put their horses under shelter, ascended to the chamber above. Meanwhile, the Scottish chief, assisted by one of the men, disengaged the sufferer from his wet garments, and covered him with the blankets of the bed. Recovered to recollection by the comparative comfort, the stranger opened his eyes. He fixed them on Wallace, then looked around, and turned to Wallace again. "I have nothing but thanks to offer for this kindness," he said. "You seem to be of the highest rank, and yet have succoured one whom the world abjures!" The knight returned a courteous

answer, and the invalid, in a paroxysm of emotion, added, "Can it be possible that a prince of France has dared to act thus contrary to his peers?"

Wallace, not apprehending what had given rise to this question, supposed the stranger's wits were disordered, and looked with inquiry towards the attendant. Just at that moment a step sounded above, and an exclamation of surprise followed it, in a voice that startled Wallace. He turned hastily round, and a young man sprang from the cottage stairs into the apartment—joy danced in every feature, and the ejaculations, "Wallace!"—"Bruce!" burst at once from the hearts of the two friends as they rushed into each other's arms. All else present were lost to them in the delight of meeting after so perilous a separation—each saw in the other the hope of Scotland; and when they embraced, it was not merely with the ardour of friendship, but with that of patriotism, rejoicing in the preservation of its chief dependence. While the chiefs freely spoke in their native tongue, before a people who could not be supposed to understand them, the aged stranger on the bed reiterated his moans. Wallace, telling Bruce the manner of his rencontre with the sick man, and his belief that he was disordered in his mind, drew towards the bed, and offered him some of the decoction which the woman now brought. The invalid drank it, and gazed earnestly, first on Wallace and then on Bruce. "Pierre, withdraw!" cried he to his personal attendant. The man obeyed. "Sit down by me, noble friends," said he to the Scottish chiefs, "and read a lesson which I pray ye lay to your hearts!" Bruce glanced a look at Wallace that declared he was of his opinion. Wallace drew a stool, while his friend seated himself on the bed. The old woman, perceiving something extraordinary in the countenance of the bruised stranger, thought he was going to reveal some secret heavy on his mind, and also withdrew.

"You think my intellects are injured," resumed he, turning to Wallace, "because I addressed you as one of the house of Philip! Those jewelled lilies round your helmet led me into the error: I never before saw them granted to other than a prince of the blood. But think not, brave man, I respect you less, since I have discovered that you are not of the race of Philip—that you are other than a prince! Look on me, at this emaciated form, and behold the reverses of all

earthly grandeur ! This palsied hand once held a sceptre—these hollow temples were once bound with a crown ! He that used to be followed as the source of honour, as the fountain of prosperity, with suppliants at his feet, and flatterers at his side, would now be left to solitude were it not for these few faithful servants, who, in spite of all changes, have preserved their allegiance to the end. Look on me, chiefs, and behold him who was the king of Scots.”

At this declaration, both Wallace and Bruce, struck with surprise and compassion at meeting their ancient enemy reduced to such abject misery, with one impulse bowed their heads to him with an air of reverence. The action penetrated the heart of Baliol. For when at the meeting and mutual exclamation of the two friends, he recognised in whose presence he lay, he remembered that, by his base submissions, turning the scale of judgment in his favour, he had defrauded the grandsire of the very Bruce now before him of a fair decision on his rights to the crown ! And when he looked on Wallace, who had preserved him from the effects of his accident, his conscience doubly smote him, for, from the hour of his elevation to that of his downfall, he had ever persecuted the family of Wallace ; and at the hour which was the crisis of her fate, had denied them the right of drawing their swords in the defence of Scotland. He, her king, had resigned her into the hands of an usurper, but Wallace, the injured Wallace, had arisen like a star of light on the deep darkness of her captivity, and Scotland was once more free. To these young men so strangely brought before him, and both of whom he had wronged, he determined immediately to reveal himself, and see whether they were equally resentful of injuries as those he had served had proved ungrateful for benefits received. He spoke, and when, instead of seeing the pair rise in indignation on his pronouncing his name, they bowed their heads and sat in respectful silence, he burst into tears. He caught the hand of Bruce, who sat nearest to him, and stretching out the other to Wallace, exclaimed, “I have not deserved this goodness from either of you. Perhaps you two are the only men now living whom I ever greatly injured, and you, excepting my four poor attendants, are perhaps the only men living who would compassionate my misfortunes !”

“These are lessons, king,” returned Wallace with reverence,

“to fit you for a better crown. And never in my eyes did the descendant of Alexander seem so worthy of his blood!” The grateful monarch pressed his hand. Bruce continued to gaze on him with a thousand awful thoughts occupying his mind. Baliol read in his expressive countenance the reflections which chained his tongue. “Behold how low is laid the proud rival of your grandfather!” exclaimed he, turning to Bruce. “I compassed a throne I could not fill. I mistook the robes, the homage, for the kingly dignity. I bartered the liberties of my country for a crown I knew not how to wear, and the insidious trafficker not only reclaimed it, but repaid me with a prison. There I expiated my crime against the Bruce! Not one of all the Scottish lords who crowded Edward’s court came to beguile a moment of sorrow from their captive monarch. Lonely I lived, for the tyrant even deprived me of the comfort of seeing my fellow-prisoner, Lord Douglas, whom attachment to my true interests had betrayed to an English prison. I never saw him after the day of his being put into the Tower until that of his death.” Wallace interrupted Baliol with an exclamation of surprise. “Yes,” added he, “I myself closed his eyes. At that awful hour he had petitioned to see me, and the boon was granted. I went to him, and then, with his dying breath, he spoke truths to me which were indeed messengers from heaven! They taught me what I was and what I might be. He died. Edward was then in Flanders, and you, brave Wallace, being triumphant in Scotland, and laying such a stress in your negotiations for the return of Douglas, the Southron cabinet agreed to conceal his death, and turn your anxiety for him to their own advantage.”

A deep scarlet kindled over the face of Bruce. “With what a race have I been so long connected! What mean subterfuges, what dastardly deceits, for the leaders of a great nation to adopt! Oh, king!” exclaimed he, turning to Baliol, “if you have errors to atone for, what must be the penalty of my sin for holding so long with an enemy as vile as he is ambitious! Scotland! Scotland! I must weep tears of blood for this!” He rose in agitation. Baliol followed him with his eyes. “Amiable Bruce! you too severely arraign a fault that was venial in you. Your father gave himself to Edward, and his son accompanied the tribute.” Bruce vehemently answered, “If King Edward ever said that, he

uttered a falsehood. My father loved him, confided in him, and the ingrate betrayed him ! His fidelity was no gift of himself in acknowledgment of inferiority ; it was the pledge of a friendship exchanged on equal terms on the fields of Palestine. And well did King Edward know that he had no right over either my father or me. He knew he had no legal claim on us, and forgetting every law, human and divine, he made us prisoners. But my father found liberty in the grave, and I am ready to take a sure revenge in——” he would have added Scotland, but he forbore to give the last blow to the unhappy Baliol by showing him that his kingdom had indeed passed from him, and that the man was before him who might be destined to wield his sceptre. Bruce paused, and sat down in generous confusion.

“Hesitate not,” said Baliol, “to say where you will take your revenge ! I know that Wallace has laid open the way. Had I possessed such a leader of my troops, I should not now be a creature to be pitied and despised. Wear him, Bruce—wear him in your heart’s core. He gives the throne he might have filled.” “Make not that a subject of praise,” cried Wallace, “which, if I had left undone, would have stamped me a traitor. I have only performed my duty ; and may the Holy Anointer of the hearts of kings guide Bruce to his kingdom, and keep him there in peace and honour !”

Baliol rose in his bed at these words. “Bruce,” said he, “approach me near.” He obeyed. The feeble monarch turned to Wallace. “You have supported what was my kingdom through its last struggles for liberty : put forth your hand and support its exiled sovereign in his last regal act.” Wallace raised the king so as to enable him to assume a kneeling posture. Dizzy with the exertion, for a moment he rested on the shoulder of the chief, and then looking up he met the eye of Bruce gazing on him with compassionate interest. The unhappy monarch stretched out his arms to heaven. “May God pardon the injuries which my fatal ambition did to you and yours—the miseries I brought upon my country ; and let your reign redeem my errors ! May the spirit of wisdom bless you, my son !” His hands were now laid, with pious fervour, on the head of Bruce, who sank on his knees before him. “Whatever rights I had to the crown of Scotland, by the worthlessness of my reign they are forfeited, and I resign all unto you, even to the participation of the

mere title of king. It has been as the ghost of my former self, as an accusing spirit to me, but I trust an angel of light to you; it will conduct your people into all happiness!" Exhausted by his feelings, he sank back into the arms of Wallace.

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE WIDOW'S CELL.

THE entrance of the old woman, about an hour after sunrise, awakened Wallace, but Baliol continued to sleep. On the chief's opening his eyes, Bruce with a smile stretched out his hand to him. Wallace rose, and whispering the widow to abide by her guest till they should return, the twain went forth to enjoy the mutual confidence of friendship. A wood opened at a little distance, and thither they bent their way, Wallace, seating himself under an overhanging beech and listening with mingled pain and satisfaction to the communications which Bruce had to impart relative to the recent scenes in Durham.

The discourse next turned on their future plans. Wallace, narrating his adventure with the Red Reaver, and the acknowledgments of Philip for the rescue of his son, proposed that the favour he should ask in return, should be his interference with Edward to grant the Scots a peaceable retention of their rights. "In that case, my prince," said he, "you will take possession of your kingdom with the olive branch in your hand." Bruce smiled, but shook his head. "And what, then, will Robert Bruce be? A king, to be sure!—but a king without a name! Who won me my kingdom? Who accomplished this peace? Was it not William Wallace? I am not jealous of your fame, Wallace; I glory in it, for you are more to me than the light to my eyes; but I would prove my right to the crown by deeds worthy of a sovereign. Till I have shown myself in the field against Scotland's enemies I cannot consent to be restored to my inheritance, even by you."

"And is it in war alone," returned Wallace, "that you can show deeds worthy of a sovereign? Look on the annals of history; nay, on the daily occurrences of the world, and see how many are brave and complete generals—how few wise legislators—how few such efficient rulers as to pro-

cure obedience to the laws, and so give happiness to their people. This is the commission of a king—to be the representative on earth of the Father who is in heaven. Here is exercise for courage, for enterprise, for fortitude, for every virtue which elevates the character of man—this is the godlike jurisdiction of a sovereign. To lead his people to scenes of carnage is often a duty in kings; but it is one of those necessities which reminds the conqueror of the degraded state of morality. For, how far must man have fallen beneath his former heavenly nature before he can delight in the destruction of his fellow-men! Lament not that I have kept your hands from the stains of blood. Show yourself beyond the vulgar apprehension of what is fame, and, conscious of the powers with which the Creator has endowed you, assume your throne with the dignity that is their due. Whether it be to the cabinet or to the field that he calls you to act, obey; and rely on it, a name greater than that of the hero of Macedon will await Robert, king of Scots!” “You almost persuade me,” returned Bruce; “but let us see Philip, and then I will decide.”

As morning was now advanced, the friends turned towards the cottage, intending to see Baliol safe, and then proceed together to Guienne to the rescue of Lady Helen. That accomplished, they would visit Paris and hear its monarch’s determination.

They found Baliol awake, and anxiously inquiring of the widow what was become of the two knights. At sight of them he stretched out his hands to both, and said he should be able to travel in a few hours. Wallace proposed sending to Rouen for a litter to carry him the more easily thither. “No,” cried Baliol with a frown; “Rouen shall never see me again. It was coming from thence that I lost my way last night, and though my servants would gladly have returned with me sooner than see me perish in the storm; yet, rather would I have been found dead on the road, a reproach to the kings who have betrayed me, than have taken an hour’s shelter in that inhospitable city.”

While the friends took the breakfast prepared for them by the widow, Baliol related that in consequence of the interference of Philip le Bel with Edward, he had been released from the Tower of London and sent to France, but under an oath never to leave that country. Philip gave the exiled

king the castle of Galliard for a residence, where for some time he enjoyed the shadow of royalty, having still a sort of court composed of his own noble followers, and the barons of the neighbourhood. Philip allowed him guards and a splendid table. But on the peace being signed between France and England, in order that Edward might give up his ally, the Earl of Flanders, to his offended liege lord, the French monarch consented to relinquish the cause of Baliol, and though he should continue to grant him a shelter in his dominions, he removed from him all the appendages of a king.

"Accordingly," continued Baliol, "the guard was taken from my gates; my establishment reduced to that of a private nobleman, and no longer having it in my power to gratify the avidity, or to flatter the ambition of those who came about me, I was soon left alone. All but the poor old lieges whom you see, and who have been faithful to me through every change of my life, instantly deserted the forlorn Baliol. In vain I remonstrated with Philip; either my letters never reached him, or he disdained to answer the man whose claims he had abandoned. Things were in this state when the other day an English lord found it convenient to bring his suite to my castle. I received him with hospitality, but soon found that what I gave in courtesy he seized as a right. In the true spirit of his master, Edward, he treated me more like the keeper of an hostel than a generous host. And on my attempting to plead with him for a Scottish lady whom his turbulent passions have forced from her country, and reduced to a pitiable state of illness, he derided my arguments, sarcastically telling me that, had I taken care of my kingdom, the door would not have been left open for him to steal its fairest prize."

Wallace interrupted him—"Heaven grant you may be speaking of Lord de Valence and Lady Helen Mar!" "I am," replied Baliol: "they are now at Galliard, and as her illness seems a lingering one, De Valence declared to me his intentions of continuing there. He carried himself with so much haughtiness, that, provoked beyond endurance, I ordered my horse, and, accompanied by my honest courtiers, rode to Rouen to obtain redress from the governor. But the unworthy Frenchman advised me to go back, and by flattering De Valence, try to regain the favour of Edward.

I retired in indignation, determining to assert my own rights in my own castle, but the storm overtook me, and being forsaken by false friends, I am saved by generous enemies."

Wallace explained his errand respecting Lady Helen, and anxiously inquired of Baliol whether he meant to return to Galliard? "Immediately," replied he; "go with me, and if the lady consent (which I do not doubt, for she scorns his prayers for her hand, and passes night and day in tears) I engage to assist in her escape."

Baliol then advised they should not all return to the castle together, the sight of two knights of their appearance accompanying his host being likely to alarm De Valence. "The quietest way," continued the deposed king, "is the surest. Follow me at a short distance, and towards evening knock at the gates and request a night's entertainment. I will grant it, and then your happy destiny, ever fortunate Wallace, must do the rest."

This scheme being approved, a litter of hurdles was formed for the invalid monarch, and the old woman's pallet spread upon it, "I will return it to you, my good widow," said Baliol, "and with proofs of my gratitude." The two friends assisted the king to rise and supported his emaciated figure towards the door. The widow stood to see her guests depart. As Baliol mounted the litter he slid a piece of gold into her hand. Wallace saw not what the king had given, and gave a purse as his reward. Bruce had naught to bestow. He had left Durham with little, and that little was expended. "My good widow," said he, "I am poor in everything but gratitude. In lieu of gold you must accept my prayers!" "May they," replied she, "return on your own head, giving you bread from the barren land and water out of the sterile rock!" "And have you no blessing for me, mother?" asked Wallace, turning round and regarding her with an impressive look; "some spirit you wist not of speaks in your words." "Then it must be a good spirit," answered she, "for all around me betokens gladness. The Scripture saith, 'Be kind to the wayfaring man, for many have so entertained angels unawares!' Yesterday at this time I was the poorest of all the daughters of charity. Last night I opened my doors in the storm, you enter, and give me riches; he follows and endows me with his prayers! Am I not then greatly favoured by Him who dispenseth to all who trust in Him. His mercy and your good-

ness shall not be hidden, for from this day forth I will light a fire each night in a part of my house whence it may be seen on every side from a great distance ; it shall shine afar, and give light and comfort to all who approach it." "And when you look on it," said Wallace, "tell your beads for me. I am a son of war, and it may blaze when my vital spark is expiring." The widow paused, gazed on him steadily, and then burst into tears. "Is it possible," cried she, "that beautiful face may be laid in dust, that youthful form lie cold in clay, and these aged limbs survive to light a beacon to your memory ! —and it shall arise ! it shall burn like a holy flame, an incense to heaven for the soul of him who has succoured the feeble, and made the widow's heart to sing for joy." Wallace pressed the old woman's withered hand ; Bruce did the same. She saw them mount their horses, and when they disappeared from her eyes, she returned into her cottage and wept.

CHAPTER LIX.

CHATEAU GALLIARD.

WHEN Baliol arrived within a few miles of Chateau Galliard he pointed to a wooded part of the forest, and told his friends that they had best shelter themselves till the sun set, soon after which he should expect them at the castle.

Long indeed seemed the interval. It usually happens, that in contemplating a project, while the period of its execution appears distant, we think on it with composure ; but when the time of action is near, when we only wait the approach of an auxiliary, or the lapse of an hour, every passing moment seems an age, and the impatient soul is ready to break every bound, to grasp the completion of its enterprise. So Wallace now felt —felt as he had never done before ; for in all his warlike exploits each achievement had immediately followed the resolve ; but here he was delayed, to grow in ardour as he contemplated an essay in which every generous principle of a man was summoned into action. He was going to rescue a helpless woman from the hands of a man of violence ; she was also the daughter of his first ally in the great struggle for Scotland, and who had fallen in the cause. Glad was he then to see the sun sink behind the distant hills. At that moment he and his friend closed their visors, mounted their horses, and set off on full speed towards the chateau.

When they came in view of the antique towers of Galliard, they slackened their pace, and leisurely advanced to the gates. Wallace demanded admittance; a courteous assent was brought by the warder; the gates unfolded, the friends entered, and in the next instant they were conducted into a room where Baliol sat. De Valence was walking to and fro in a great chafe; he started at sight of the princely armour of Wallace (for he, as Baliol had done, now conceived, from the liliated diadem, that the stranger must be of the royal house of France), and composing his turbulent spirit, he bowed respectfully to the supposed prince. Wallace returned the salutation, and Baliol, rising, accosted him with a dignified welcome. He saw the mistake of De Valence, and perceived how greatly it might facilitate the execution of their project.

On his host's return to the chateau, De Valence had received him with more than his former insolence, for the governor of Rouen had sent him information of the despised monarch's discontent; and when the despotic lord heard a bugle at the gate, and learnt that it was answered by the admission of two travelling knights, he flew at Baliol in displeasure, commanding him to recall his granted leave. At the moment of his wrath, Wallace entered, and covered him with confusion. Struck at seeing a French prince in one of the persons he was going to treat with such indignity, he shrunk into himself and bowed before him with all the cowering meanness of a base and haughty soul. Wallace, feeling his real pre-eminence, bent his head in acknowledgment with a majesty which convinced the earl that he was not mistaken. Baliol welcomed his guest in a manner not to dispel the illusion.

"Happy am I," cried he, "that the hospitality which John Baliol intended to show to a mere traveller confers on him the distinction of serving one of a race whose favour confers protection, and its friendship honour." Wallace returned a gracious reply to this speech; and turning to Bruce, said, "This knight is my friend; and though neither of us choose to disclose our names during our journey, yet, whatever they may be, I trust you will confide in the word of one whom you have honoured by the address you have now made, and believe that his friend is not unworthy the hospitalities of him who was once king of Scots."

De Valence now approached, and, announcing who he was, assured the knights in the name of the King of England, whom

he was going to represent in Guienne, of every respect from himself, and assistance from his retinue, to bring them properly on their way. "I return you the thanks due to your courtesy," replied Wallace; "and shall certainly remain to-night a burden on King Baliol; but in the morning we must depart as we came, having a vow to perform, which excludes the service of attendants."

A splendid supper was served, at the board of which De Valence sat as well as Baliol. From the moment that the strangers entered the English earl never withdrew; so cautious was he to prevent Baliol informing his guests of the captivity of Lady Helen Mar. Wallace saw that the execution of his project must depend wholly upon himself; and how to inform Helen that he was in the castle, and of his plan to get her out of it, hardly occupied him more than what to devise to detain De Valence in the banqueting-room, while he went forth to prosecute his design.

Wallace wrapped himself in Baliol's blue cloak, which lay in the anteroom, and moved swiftly along the gallery towards the chamber of Helen. To be prepared for obstacles he had obtained from Baliol a particular description of the situation of every apartment leading to it. He passed through several large vacant rooms, and at last arrived at the important door. It opened into a small chamber in which two female attendants lay asleep. He gently raised the latch, and with caution taking the lamp which burned on the table, glided softly through the curtains which filled the arch that led into the apartment of Helen. He approached the bed, covering the light with his hand, while he observed her. She was in a profound sleep, but pale as the sheet which enveloped her. Her countenance seemed troubled, and she started as she dreamed as if in apprehension. Once he heard her murmur, "Save me, my father! on you alone——" there she stopped. His heart bled at this appeal. "Thy father's friend comes to save thee!" he would have cried, but he checked the exclamation: his hand dropped at the same instant from before the lamp, and the blaze striking full on her eyes, waked her. She looked up, she believed her dream realised—De Valence leaning over her bed, and herself wholly in his power! A shriek of horror was bursting from her lips when Wallace hastily raised his visor. At the moment when despair was in her heart, and her whole soul turned with abhorrence from the supposed De Valence, she

met the eyes dearest to her on earth—those of indeed her father's friend. Stretching forth her arms, for an instant she seemed flying to the protection of him to whose honour she had been bequeathed, but falling back again on her bed, the glad surprise of seeing him shook her with such emotion, that Wallace feared to see her sink into some deadly swoon. He threw himself on his knees beside her and whispered, "Be composed, for the love of heaven and your own safety. Be collected and firm, and you shall fly this place with me to-night." Hardly conscious of the action, Helen grasped the hand that held hers, and would have replied, but her voice failing, she fainted on his arm. Wallace now saw no alternative but to remove her even in this insensible state, and raising her gently in his arms, enveloped in the silk coverlet, with cautious steps he bore her through the curtained entrance, and passed the sleeping damsels in the anterooms. To meet any of De Valence's men while in this situation would betray all. To avoid this he hastened through the illuminated passages, and turning into the apartment appointed for himself, laid the now reviving Helen upon a couch. "Water," she said, "and I will soon be myself again." He gave her some, and at the same time laying a page's suit of clothes (which Baliol had provided) beside her, "Dress yourself in these, Lady Helen," said he; "I shall withdraw meanwhile into the passage, but your safety depends on expedition."

Before she could answer he had disappeared. Helen instantly threw herself on her knees to thank a higher Power for this commencement of her deliverance, and to beseech His blessing on its consummation. She rose strengthened, and, obeying Wallace, the moment she was equipped, she laid her hand upon the latch, but her friend heard her, and immediately opened the door. The lamps of the gallery shone full upon the light grace of her figure, as shrinking with modesty and yet eager to be with her preserver, she stood hesitating before him. He threw his cloak over her, and putting her arm through his, in the unobscured blaze of his princely armour, he descended to the lower hall of the castle. One man only was there. Wallace ordered him to open the great door. "It is a fine night," said he, "and I shall ride some miles before I sleep." The man asked if he were to saddle the horses. He was answered in the affirmative, and the gate being immediately unbarred, Wallace led his precious charge into the freedom of

the open air. As soon as she saw the outside of those towers which she had entered as the worst of all prisoners, her heart so overflowed with gratitude to her deliverer, that sinking by his side upon her knees, she could only grasp his hand and bathe it with the pure tears of rescued innocence. Her manner penetrated his soul ; he raised her in his arms, but she, dreading that she had perhaps done too much, convulsively articulated, " My father—his blessing—" " Was a rich endowment, Lady Helen," returned Wallace, " and you shall ever find me deserving it." Her head leaned on his breast—soul meeting soul—innocence resting on the bosom of virtue. No thought that saints would not have approved was there, no emotion which angels might not have shared glowed in their grateful bosoms—she grateful to him, both grateful to God.

The man brought the horses from the stable. He knew that two strangers had arrived at the castle, and not noticing Helen's stature, supposed they were both before him. He had been informed by the servants that the taller of the two was the Count de Valois, and he now held the stirrup for him to mount, but Wallace put Helen on Bruce's horse, and then vaulting on his own, put a piece of gold into the attendant's hand. " You will return, noble prince ? " inquired the man. " Why should you doubt it ? " answered Wallace. " Because," replied the servant, " I wish the brother of the King of France to know the foul deeds which are doing in his dominions." " By whom ? " asked Wallace, surprised at this address. " By the Earl de Valence, prince," answered he ; " he has now in this castle a beautiful lady whom he brought from a foreign land, and treats in a manner unbecoming a knight or a man." " And what would you have me do ? " said Wallace, willing to judge whether this applicant were honest in his appeal. " Come in the power of your royal brother," answered he, " and demand the Lady Helen Mar of Lord de Valence."

Helen, who had listened with trepidation to this dialogue, drew nearer Wallace, and whispered in an agitated voice, " Ah ! let us hasten away." The man was close enough to hear her. " Hah ! " cried he, in a burst of doubtful joy : " is it so ? Is she here ? say so, noble knight, and Joppa Grimsby will serve ye both for ever ! " " Grimsby," cried Helen, recollecting his voice the moment he had declared his name ; " what, the honest English soldier ? I and my preserver will indeed value so trusty a follower."

The name of Grimsby was too familiar to the memory of Wallace for him not to recognise it with melancholy pleasure. He had never seen Grimsby, but he knew him well worthy of his confidence, and ordered him (if he really desired to follow Lady Helen) to bring two more horses from the stables. When they were brought, Wallace made the joyful signal concerted with Bruce and Baliol, to sound the Scottish pryse as soon as he and his fair charge were out of the castle.

The happy tidings met the ear of the prince while anxiously watching De Valence for fear he should awake, and interrupt Wallace in his enterprise. What, then, was his transport when the first note of the horn burst upon the silence around him ! He sprang on his feet. The impetuosity of the action roused Baliol, who had been lying all the while sound asleep in his chair. Bruce made a sign to him to be silent, and pressing his hand with energy, forgot the former Baliol in the present, and for a moment bending his knee, kissed the hand he held, then rising, disappeared in an instant.

He flew through the open gates. Wallace perceiving him, rode out from under the shadow of the trees. The moon shone on his sparkling crest ; that was sufficient for Bruce, and Wallace, falling back again into the shade, was joined the next moment by his friend. Who this friend was for whom her deliverer had told Helen he waited, she did not ask, for she dreaded while so near danger, to breathe a word. As Bruce approached, his black mantle so wrapped him she could not distinguish his figure. Wallace stretched forth his hand to him in silence ; he grasped it with warm but mute congratulation of friendship, and throwing himself on his horse, triumphantly exclaimed, " Now for Paris ! " Helen recognised none she knew in that voice, and drawing close to the white courser of Wallace with something like disappointment mingling with her happier thoughts, she made her horse keep pace with the fleetness of her companions.

CHAPTER LX.

FOREST OF VINCENNES.

AVOIDING the frequented track to Paris, Wallace took a sequestered path by the banks of the Marne, and entered the forest of Vincennes just as the moon set. Having ridden far and without cessation, Grimsby proposed their alighting

to allow the lady an opportunity of reposing awhile under the trees. Helen was indeed nearly exhausted, though the idea of her happy flight for a long time had kept her insensible to fatigue. So bewildered were her faculties that she almost feared she was only enjoying one of those dreams which, since her captivity, had mocked her with the image of release, and every moment she dreaded to awake and find herself still a prisoner of De Valence. "I want no rest," replied she to the observation of Grimsby; "I could feel none till we are beyond the possibility of being overtaken by my enemy." "You are as safe in this wood, lady," returned the soldier, "as you can be in any place betwixt Galliard and Paris. It is many miles from the chateau, and lies in so remote a direction, that were the earl to pursue us, I am sure he would never choose this path." "And did he even come up with us, dear Lady Helen," said Wallace, "could you fear, when with your father's friend?" "It is for my father's friend I fear," gently answered she; "I can have no dreads for myself while under such protection."

A very little more persuaded Helen; and Grimsby having spread his cloak on the grass, Wallace lifted her from the horse. As soon as she put foot to the ground her head grew giddy, and she must have fallen but for the supporting arm of her watchful friend. He carried her to the couch prepared by the good soldier, and laid her on it. Grimsby had been more provident than they could have expected, for after saddling the second pair of horses, he had returned into the hall for his cloak, and taking an undrawn flask of wine from the seneschal's supper-table, put it into his vest. This he now produced, and Wallace made Helen drink some of it. The cordial revived her, and, sinking on her pillow of leaves, she soon found the repose her wearied frame demanded. Wallace watched at her head, and Bruce sat at her feet, while Grimsby remained with the horses as a kind of outpost.

Deep was her sleep. But some wild animal in its nightly prowling crossing before the horses, they began to snort and plunge, and it was with difficulty Grimsby could quiet them. The noise suddenly awoke Helen, and her scattered faculties not immediately recollecting themselves, she felt an instant impression that all had been but a dream, and starting in affright, she exclaimed—"Where am I? Wallace, where art thou?" "Here!" cried he, pressing her hand with fraternal tender-

ness ; " I am here ; you are safe with your friend and brother." Her heart beat with a terror which this assurance could hardly subdue. At last she said in an agitated voice, " Forgive me, if my senses are a little strayed ! I have suffered so much, and this release seems so miraculous, that at moments I hardly believe it real. I wish daylight were come that I might be convinced." When she had uttered these words she suddenly stopped, and then added, " But I am very weak to talk thus. I believe my late terrors have disordered my head."

" What you feel, lady, is only natural," observed Bruce ; " I experienced the same when I first regained my liberty, and found myself on the road to join Sir William Wallace. Dear, indeed, is liberty ; but dearer is the friend whose virtues make our recovered freedom sure." " Who speaks to me ?" said Helen, in a low voice to Wallace. " One," answered Wallace, in the same tone, " who is not to be publicly known until occasion demands it ; one who, I trust in God, will one day seal the happiness of Scotland—Robert Bruce." That name which, when in her idea it belonged to Wallace, used to raise such emotions in her breast, she now heard with an indifference that surprised her. But who could be more to Scotland than Wallace had been ? All that was in the power of patriot or of king to do for his country he had done ; and what then was Bruce in her estimation ? One who, basking in pleasures while his country suffered, allowed a brave subject to overthrow every danger, before he would put himself forward ! and now appeared to assume a throne, which, though his right by birth, he had most justly forfeited, by neglecting the duties indispensable in the heir of so great and oppressed a kingdom ! These would have been her thoughts of him, but Wallace called this Bruce his friend, and the few words she had heard him speak being full of gratitude to her deliverer, that engaged her esteem.

The answer, however, which she made to the reply of Wallace was spontaneous, and it struck upon the heart of Bruce. " How long," said she, " have you promised Scotland it should see that day !"

" Long, to my grief, Lady Helen," rejoined Bruce ; " I would say to my shame, had I ever intentionally erred towards my country ; but ignorance of her state, and of the depth of Edward's treachery, was my crime. I only required to be shown the right path to pursue it, and Sir William Wallace came

to point the way. My soul, lady, is not unworthy the destiny to which he calls me." Had there been light she would have seen the flash that overspread his fine countenance while he spoke, but the words were sufficient to impress her with that respect he deserved, and which her answer showed. "My father taught me to consider the Bruce the rightful heirs of Scotland ; and now that I see the day which he so often wished to hail, I cannot but regard it as the termination of Scotland's woes. Oh ! had it been before ! perhaps——" here she paused for tears stopped her utterance. "You think," rejoined Bruce, "that much bloodshed might have been spared ! But, dear lady, poison not the comfort of your life by that belief. No man exists who could have effected so much for Scotland in so short a time, and with so little loss, as our Wallace has done. Who, like him, makes mercy the companion of war, and compels even his enemies to emulate the clemency he shows ? Fewer have been slain on the Scottish side during the whole of her struggle with Edward than were lost by Baliol on the fatal day of Dunbar. Then no quarter was given, and many of the wounded were left to perish on the field. But with Wallace, life was granted to all who asked ; the wounded enemy and the friend were alike succoured by him. This conduct provoked the jealousy of the Southron generals, not to be surpassed in generosity, and thus comparatively few have been lost. But if in that number some were our noblest chiefs, we must be resigned to yield to God what is His own ; nay, we must be grateful, daughter of Mar, for the manner in which they were taken. They fell in the arms of true glory, like parents defending their offspring ; while others—my grandfather and father—perished with broken hearts, in unavailing lamentations that they could not share the fate of those who died for Scotland." "But you, dear Bruce," returned Wallace, "will live for her ; will teach those whose hearts have bled in her cause to find a balm for every wound in her prosperity."

Helen smiled through her tears at these words. "If Scotland be to rest under the happy reign of Robert Bruce, envy cannot again assail Sir William Wallace, and my father has not shed his blood in vain. His spirit, with those of my uncles Bothwell and Ruthven, will rejoice in such a peace ; and I shall enjoy it to felicity, in so sacred a participation." Surprised at her associating the name of Lord Ruthven with those who had fallen, Wallace interrupted her with the assurance of her

uncle's safety. The Scottish chiefs understood that De Valence had given her the opposite intelligence, to impress her with an idea that she was friendless, and so precipitate her into becoming his wife. But she did not repeat all the arguments he had used to shake her heart. He had told her that the day in which she would give him her hand King Edward would send him viceroy into Scotland, where she should reign a queen. He was handsome, accomplished, and adored her; but Helen could not love him whom she could not esteem, for she knew he was libertine, base, and cruel. Personal flatteries having made no impression on Helen, ambitious projects were attempted with equal failure. Could De Valence have made her the envy and admiration of a congregated world, all would have been in vain; she had seen and known the virtues of Sir William Wallace, and all that was desirable on earth seemed to her to be in him summed up.

Every word which this almost adored friend now said to comfort her took root in her soul, and sprang up into resignation and happiness. She listened to the plans of Wallace and of Bruce to effect their great enterprise, and the hours of the night passed to her not only in repose, but in enjoyment. Wallace, though pleased with the interest she took in even the minutest details of their design, became fearful of overtaking her weakened frame; he whispered Bruce to gradually drop the conversation, and, as it died away, slumber again stole over her eyelids.

The dawn had spread over the sky when Helen awoke. The lark was then soaring with shrill cadence over her head; its notes pierced the ear of Bruce, and he started on his feet. "You have allowed me to sleep, Wallace?" "And why not?" replied he. "Here it was safe for all to have slept. Yet, had there been danger, I was at my post to have called you." He gently smiled as he spoke, and seating her on horseback they recommenced their journey. The helmets of both chiefs were now open. Grimsby looked at one and the other; the countenance of both assured him that he should find a protector in either. He drew towards Helen: she noticed his manner, and observing to Wallace that she believed the soldier wished to speak with her, checked her horse. At this action Grimsby presumed to ride up, and bowing respectfully, said that, before he followed her to Paris, it would be right for the Count de Valois to know whom he had taken into his

train ; “ one, madam, who has been degraded by King Edward—degraded,” added he, “ but not debased ; that last disgrace depends on myself, and I should shrink from your protection rather than court it were I indeed vile.” “ You have too well proved your integrity, Grimsby,” replied Helen, “ to doubt it now ; but what has the Count de Valois to do with your being under my protection ? It is not to him we go, but to the French king.” “ And is not that knight with the diadem,” inquired Grimsby, “ the Count de Valois ? The servants at Chateau Galliard told me he was so.” Surprised at this, Helen said the knight should answer for himself, and rejoined his side.

When she informed Wallace of what had passed, he called the soldier to approach. “ Grimsby,” said he, “ you have claims upon me which should ensure you my protection were I even insensible to the principles you have just declared. But I repeat I am already your friend. You have only to speak, and all in my power to serve you shall be done.” “ Then, sir,” returned he, “ if you will honour me with your attention, I would relate how I fell into disgrace with my sovereign.”

Wallace fell a little back with Grimsby ; and prepared to listen to the recapitulation of scenes in which he was only too deeply interested. The soldier began by narrating the events at Elderslie, which had compelled him to leave the army in Scotland. He related that after quitting the priory of St. Fillan, he reached Guienne, and there served under the Earl of Lincoln, until the marriage of Edward with King Philip’s sister gave the English monarch quiet possession of that province. Grimsby then marched with the rest of the troops to join their sovereign in Flanders. There he was recognised and brought to judgment by one of Heselrigge’s captains. But on the representation of the Earl of Lincoln, his punishment was mitigated from death to the infliction of a certain number of lashes. This sentence, which the honest soldier regarded as worse than the loss of life, was executed. On stripping him at the halberts, Lady Helen’s gift, the diamond clasp, was found hanging round his neck. This was seized as a proof of some new crime : and so inconsistent were his judges, that while they allowed his treason (for so they stigmatised his manly resentment of Heselrigge’s cruelty) to prejudice them in this second charge, they would not believe that this very jewel had been given to him by a friend of Sir

William Wallace in reward for his behaviour on that occasion. He appealed to Edward, but he appealed in vain, and on the following day he was adjudged to be broken on the wheel for the supposed robbery. Every heart was callous to his sufferings but that of the wife of his jailer, who, at the dead of night, opened his prison doors. He fled into Normandy, and outlawed, branded as a traitor and a thief, he was wandering half-desperate one stormy night on the banks of the Marne, when a cry of distress attracted his attention. It issued from the suite of De Valence, on his way to Guienne. Scared at the tempest, the female attendants of Lady Helen had abandoned themselves to shrieks of despair, but she, insensible to anything but grief, lay in perfect stillness in the litter that conveyed her. As Grimsby approached, De Valence demanded his assistance to conduct them to a place of shelter. Chateau Galliard was the nearest residence fit to receive the earl and his train. Thither the soldier led them, and heard from the servants that the lady in the vehicle was their lord's wife, and a lunatic. Grimsby remained at the chateau because he had nowhere else to go, and soon learned that the lady was not married to the earl, and was not only perfectly sane, but often most cruelly treated. Her name he had never learnt until the last evening, when, carrying some wine into the banqueting-room, he heard De Valence mention it to the other stranger knight. He then retired full of horror, resolving to essay her rescue himself, but the unexpected sight of the two knights in the hall determined him to reveal the case to them. "This," added Grimsby, "is my story, and whoever you are, noble lord, if you think me not unworthy your protection, grant it, and you shall find me faithful unto death."

"I owe you that and more," replied the chief; "I am that Wallace on whose account you fled your country, and if you be willing to share the fortunes of one who may live and die in camps, I pledge you that my best destiny shall be yours." Could Grimsby in his joyful surprise have thrown himself at the feet of Wallace, he would have done so, but taking hold of the end of his scarf, he pressed it enthusiastically to his lips, and exclaimed, "This is beyond my prayers, to meet here the triumphant lord of Scotland! I fell innocently into disgrace; ah! how am I now exalted unto honour! My country would have deprived me of life; I am therefore dead to it, and live only to gratitude and you!" "Then," replied Wallace,

“ as the first proof of the confidence I repose in you, know that the young chief who is riding forward with Lady Helen is Robert Bruce, the prince of Scotland. Our next enterprise is to place him upon the throne of his ancestors. Meanwhile, till we license you to do otherwise, keep our names a secret, and call us by those we may hereafter think fit to assume.”

Grimsby, once more reinstated in the station he deserved, became the active, cheerful, and faithful servant of Wallace.

Every hour seemed an age of blessedness to Helen, so gratefully did she enjoy each passing moment of a happiness that seemed to speak of Paradise. Nature never before appeared so beautiful in her eyes, the sky was more serene, the birds sung with sweeter notes, the landscape shone in brighter charms, the fragrance of the flowers bathed her senses in softest balm, and the very air as it breathed around her, seemed fraught with life and joy. But Wallace animated the scene ; and she moved as if on enchanted ground. Oh ! she could have lingered there for ever ! and hardly did she know what it was to draw any but sighs of bliss till she saw the towers of Paris embattling the horizon. They reminded her that she was now going to be occasionally divided from him ; that when entered within those walls, it would no longer be deemed decorous for her to pass days and nights in listening to his voice, in losing all of woman’s love in the beatified affection of an angel.

This passion of the soul (if such it may be called) which has its rise in virtue, and its aim the same, would be most unjustly degraded were it classed with what the herd generally entitle love. Earthly is that, and unto death it shall return ! But love, true heaven-born love, that pure affection which unites congenial spirits here, and with which the Creator will hereafter connect in one blessed fraternity the whole kindred of mankind, soars above this earth ; and anticipates, as the ultimatum of its joy, the moment when it shall meet its partner before the throne of God. Such was the sentiment of Helen towards Wallace. So unlike what she had seen in others of the universal passion, she would hardly have acknowledged to herself that what she felt was love, had not the anticipation of even an hour’s separation from him whispered the secret to her heart.

CHAPTER LXI.

PARIS.

WHEN they were arrived within a short distance from Paris, Wallace wrote to King Philip, informing him who were the companions of his journey, and that he would rest near the abbey of St. Genevieve until he should receive his majesty's greetings to Bruce ; also the queen's granted protection for the daughter of the Earl of Mar. Grimsby was the bearer of this letter. He soon returned with an escort of honour, accompanied by Prince Louis himself. At sight of Wallace he flew into his arms, and after embracing him with all the ardour of youthful gratitude, he presented to him a packet from the king.

It expressed the satisfaction of Philip at the prospect of his seeing the man whom he had long admired, and whose valour had wrought him such service as the preservation of his son. He added that he had other matters to thank him for, and subjects to discuss which would be much elucidated by the presence of Bruce. "According to your request," continued he, "the name of neither shall be made public at my court. My own family only know who are to be my illustrious guests. The queen is impatient to bid them welcome, and no less eager to greet the Lady Helen Mar with her friendship and protection."

A beautiful palfrey, superbly caparisoned, was led forward by a page. Two ladies, also, bearing rich apparel for Helen, appeared in the train. When their errand was made known to Wallace, he communicated it to Helen. Her delicacy indeed wished to lay aside her page's apparel before she was presented to the queen ; but she had been so happy while she wore it ! The ladies were conducted to her. They delivered a gracious message from their royal mistress, and opened the caskets. Helen could urge nothing in opposition to their embassy, and reluctantly assented to the change they were to make in her appearance. She stood mute while they disarrayed her of her humble guise and clothed her in the robes of France. During their attendance, in the adulatory strains of the court, they broke out in encomiums on the graces of her person ; but to all this she turned an inattentive ear—her mind was absorbed in what she had enjoyed.

One of the women was throwing the page's clothes carelessly into a bag, when Helen perceiving her, cried, "Take care of

that suit, it is more precious to me than gold or jewels." "Indeed!" answered the attendant, more respectfully folding it; "it does not seem of very rich silk." "Probably not," returned Helen, "but it is valuable to me, and wherever I lodge I will thank you to put it into my apartment." A mirror was now presented that she might see herself. She started at the load of jewels with which they had adorned her, and while tears filled her eyes, she mildly said, "I am a mourner, these ornaments must not be worn by me." The ladies obeyed her wish to have them taken off, and she was conducted towards the palfrey. Wallace approached her, and Bruce flew forward to assist her; but it was no longer the beautiful little page that met his view, the confidential and frank glance of a youthful brother—it was a lovely woman, arrayed in all the charms of female apparel, trembling and blushing, as she again appeared as a woman before the man she loved. Wallace sighed as he touched her hand, for there was something in her air which seemed to say, "I am not what I was a few minutes ago."

Her more distant air was the effect of reflections while in the abbey where he had lodged her. She saw that the frank intercourse between them was to be interrupted by the forms of a court, and her manner insensibly assumed the demeanour she was so soon to wear. Bruce looked at her with delighted wonder. He had before admired her as beautiful, he now gazed on her as transcendently so. He paused to look on her and Wallace, and contemplating them with admiration he could not but wish to see two such perfectly amiable and perfectly beautiful beings united as closely by the bonds of the altar as he believed they were in heart, and he longed for the hour when he might endow them with those proofs of his fraternal love which should class them with the first of Scottish princes. "But how," thought he, "can I ever sufficiently reward thee, Wallace, for what thou hast done for me and mine? Thy services are beyond all price; thy soul is above even empires! Then how can I show thee all that is in my heart for thee?" While he thus apostrophised his friend, Wallace and Helen advanced towards him. Bruce held out his hand to her with a cordial smile: "Lady Helen, we are still to be the same! Robes of no kind must ever separate the affections born in our pilgrimage!" She put her hand into his with a glow of delight. "While Sir William Wallace allows me to call him brother," answered she, "that will ever be a sanction to our

friendship ; but courts are formal places, and I now go to one." "And I will soon remove you to another," replied he, "where"—he hesitated, looked at Wallace, and then resumed—"where every wish of my sister Helen's heart shall be gratified, or I be no king." Helen blushed deeply and hastened towards the palfrey. Wallace placed her on the embroidered saddle, and Prince Louis preceding the cavalcade, it moved on.

As Bruce vaulted into his seat, he said something to his friend of the perfectly feminine beauty of Helen. Wallace drew a deep sigh : "I never knew but one woman who resembled her, and she did indeed excel all of created mould. From infancy to manhood I read every thought of her angelic heart : I became the purer by the study ; and I loved my model with an idolatrous adoration. There was my error ! But those hours are past. My heart will never rejoice as it has rejoiced, for she who lived but for me, who doubled all my joys, is gone ! Oh ! my prince, though blessed with friendship, there are times when I feel that I am solitary !" Bruce looked at him with some surprise. "Solitary, Wallace ! can you ever be solitary, and near Helen Mar ?" "Perhaps more so then than at any other time ; for her beauties, her excellencies, remind me of what were once mine, and recall every regret. O ! Bruce ! thou canst not comprehend my loss ! To mingle thought with thought, and soul with soul, for years ; and then, after feeling as if indeed made one, to be separated—and by a stroke of violence ! This was a trial of the spirit which, but for heaven's mercy, would have crushed me. I live, but still my heart will mourn her I have lost—and mourn that my rebellious nature will not be more resigned to the judgment of its God."

"And is love so constant, so tenacious ?" exclaimed Bruce. "Is it to consume your youth, Wallace ? Ah ! am I not to hope that the throne of my children may be upheld by a race of thine ?" Wallace shook his head. "Your throne and your children's, if they follow your example, will be upheld by Heaven ; but should they pervert themselves, a host of mortal supports would not be sufficient to stay their downfall."

In discourse like this, the youthful prince of Scotland caught a clearer view of the inmost thoughts of his friend than he had been able to discern before ; for war, or Bruce's own interests, having engaged them in all their former conversations, Wallace had never been induced to glance at the private circumstances

of his history. While Bruce sighed in tender pity for the captivated heart of Helen, he the more deeply loved his suffering and heroic friend.

A few hours brought the royal escort to the Louvre ; and Helen was led by Prince Louis into the regal saloon. The Scottish chiefs followed. The queen and the Count d'Evereux received Bruce and Helen, while De Valois conducted Wallace to the king, who had retired for the purpose of this conference to his closet.

At sight of the armour which he had sent to the preserver of his son, Philip instantly recognised the Scottish hero, and rising from his seat, hastened forward and clasped him in his arms : " Wonder not, august chief," exclaimed he, " at the weakness exhibited in these eyes ! It is the tribute of nature to a virtue which loads even kings with benefits. You have saved my son's life ; you have preserved from taint the honour of my sister ! " Philip then proceeded to inform his auditor that he had heard from a confessor of Queen Margaret's all that had lately happened at Edward's court, and of Wallace's letter to clear the innocence of that injured princess. " She is perfectly reinstated in the king's confidence," added Philip, " but I can never pardon the infamy with which he would have overwhelmed her ; nay, it has already dishonoured her, for the blasting effects of slander no time can erase. I yield to the prayers of my sister, not to openly resent this wrong, but in private he shall feel a brother's indignation. I do not declare war against him ; but ask what you will, and were it to place the crown of Scotland on your head, by my concealed agency it shall be effected." The reply of Wallace was simple. He claimed no merit in the justice he had done the Queen of England, neither in his rescue of Prince Louis ; but as a proof of King Philip's friendship, he gladly embraced his offered services with regard to Scotland. " Not," added he, " to send troops into that country against England. Scotland is now free of its Southron invaders ; all I require is, that you will use your royal influence with Edward to allow it to remain so. Pledge your faith, most gracious monarch, with my master, the royally descended Bruce, who is now in your palace. He will soon assume the crown that is his right ; and with such an ally as France to hold the ambition of Edward in check, we may certainly hope that the bloody feuds between Scotland and England may at last be laid at rest."

Wallace explained to Philip the dispositions of the Scots, the nature of Bruce's claims, and the transcendent virtues of his youthful character. The monarch took fire at the speaker's enthusiasm, and giving him his hand, exclaimed, "Wallace, I know not what manner of man you are! You seem born to dictate to kings, while you put aside as things of no moment the crowns offered to yourself. You are young and, I would say, without ambition, did I not know that your deeds and your virtues have set you above all earthly titles. But to convince me that you do not disdain the gratitude we pay, at least accept a name in my country; and know that the armour you wear, the coronet around your helmet, invest you with the title of a prince in France and the title of Count of Gascony." To have refused this mark of the monarch's esteem would have been an act of churlish pride foreign from the character of Wallace. He accepted the offered distinction, and bowing his head, allowed the king to throw the brilliant collar of Gascony over his neck.

This act was performed by Philip with all the emotions of disinterested esteem. But when he had proposed it to his brother D'Evereux, as the only way he could devise of rewarding Wallace for the preservation of his son, and the honour of their sister, he was obliged to urge in support of his wish, the desire he had to take the first opportunity of being revenged on Edward by the re-seizure of Guienne. To have Sir William Wallace lord of Gascony would then be of the greatest advantage, as no doubt could be entertained of his arms soon restoring the sister province to the French monarchy. In such a case, Philip promised to bestow Guienne on his brother D'Evereux.

To attach this new count to France was now all the wish of Philip; and he closed the conference with every expression of friendship. Wallace lost not the opportunity of pleading for the abdicated king of Scots, and Philip promised to send immediate orders to Normandy that De Valence should leave Chateau Galliard, and Baliol be attended with his former state.

The king then led his guest into the royal saloon, where they found the queen seated between Bruce and Helen. At sight of the Scottish chief, her majesty rose. Philip led him up to her, and Wallace, bending on his knee, put the hand she extended to his lips. "Welcome," said she, "bravest of knights! receive a mother's thanks." Tears of gratitude stood in her eyes. She clasped the hand of her son and his together, and added, "Louis, wherever our Count of Gascony advises

you to pledge this hand, give it." "Then it will follow mine," cried the king, putting his into that of Bruce. "You are Wallace's acknowledged sovereign, young prince, and you shall ever find brothers in me and my son! Sweet lady," added he, turning to Helen, "thanks to your charms for having drawn this friend of mankind to bless our shores!"

The court knew Wallace merely as Count of Gascony, and, to preserve an equal concealment, Bruce assumed the name of the young De Longueville, whom Prince Louis had, in fact, allowed to retire to Chartres, there to pass a year of mourning within its penitential monastery. Only two persons ever came to the Louvre who could recognise Bruce to be other than he seemed, and they were John Cummin, the elder twin brother of the present regent of Scotland, and James Lord Douglas. The former had remained in France out of dislike to his brother's proceedings, and as Bruce knew him in Guienne, and believed him to be a blunt, well-meaning young man, he saw no danger in trusting him. The brave son of William Douglas was altogether of a nobler mettle, and both Wallace and his prince rejoiced at the prospect of receiving him to their friendship.

Philip opened the affair to the two lords, and having declared his designs in favour of Bruce, conducted them into the queen's room. "There," cried he, "is the King of Scotland." Douglas and Cummin would have bent their knees to their young monarch, but Bruce prevented them. "My friends," said he, "regard me as your fellow-soldier only till you see me on the throne of my fathers. Till then, that is our prince," added he, looking on Wallace; "he is my prince, my counsellor, my example! And, if you love me, he must be yours." Douglas and Cummin turned towards Wallace at these words. Royalty did indeed sit on his brow, but with a tempered majesty which spoke only in love and honour. From the resplendent countenance of Bruce it smiled and threatened, for his impassioned nature was not yet subdued. The queen looked from one to the other. She had read in Homer's song of the deity of wisdom assuming the form of Mentor to protect the son of Ulysses, and had it not been for the youth of the Scottish chief, she would have said here is the realisation of the tale.

The king soon after led his guests to the council-room, where a secret council was to be held, to settle the future bonds between the two kingdoms; and Helen with a pensive step followed the queen to her apartment.

CHAPTER LXII.

THE LOUVRE.

THESE preliminaries of lasting friendship being arranged, and sworn to by Philip, Wallace despatched a messenger to Lord Ruthven, at Huntingtower, informing him of the present happy dispositions with regard to Scotland. He made particular inquiries respecting the state of the public mind ; and declared his intentions not to introduce Bruce amongst the cabals of his chieftains until he knew exactly how they were all disposed. Some weeks passed before a reply to this letter arrived. During the time, the health of Helen, which had been much impaired by the sufferings inflicted on her by De Valence, gradually recovered, and her beauty became as much the admiration of the French nobles as her meek dignity was of their respect. A new scene of royalty presented itself in this gay court to Wallace, for all was pageant and chivalric gallantry ; but while the princes of France were treading the dance, or tilting at each other in the tournament, the prince of Scotland, who excelled in all these exercises, left the field of gallantry undisputed, and moved an uninterested spectator through the splendid scene, talking with Wallace or with Helen on events which yet lay in fate, and whose theatre would be in the field of his native land. So accustomed had the friends now been to share their thoughts with Lady Helen, that they imparted to her their plans, and listened with pleasure to her remarks. Her soul was inspired with the same zeal for Scotland which animated their own breasts : like Bruce's, ardent ; like Wallace's, tempered with a moderation which, giving her foresight, freed her opinion from rashness. What he possessed by the suggestions of genius, or had acquired by experience, she learnt from love. It taught her to be careful for the safety of Wallace ; and while she saw that his life must often be put in peril for Scotland, her watchful spirit perceived and gave warning where his exposure might incur danger without adequate advantage.

Wallace's messenger did not arrive at his destined port in Scotland till the middle of November, and the January of 1299 had commenced before his returning barque entered the mouth of the Seine.

Wallace was alone when Grimsby, opening the door,

announced Sir Edwin Ruthven. In a moment the friends were locked in each other's arms.

Edwin answered the inquiries of Wallace respecting his country by informing him that Badenoch, having arrogated to himself the supreme power in Scotland, had determined to take every advantage of the last victory gained over King Edward. In this resolution he was supported by the Lords Athol, Buchan, and Soulis, who were returned, full of indignation, from the court of Durham. Edward removed to London; and Badenoch, hearing that he was preparing other armies for the subjugation of Scotland, sent ambassadors to the Vatican to solicit the Pope's interference. Flattered by this appeal, Boniface wrote a letter to Edward, exhorting him to refrain from further oppressing a country over which he had no lawful power. Edward's answer was full of artifice and falsehood, maintaining his pretensions to Scotland by the abandonment of every good principle, and declaring his determination to consolidate Great Britain into one kingdom, or to make the northern part one universal grave.*

"The speedy consequence of this correspondence," Edwin continued, "was a renewal of hostilities against Scotland. Badenoch took Sir Simon Fraser as his colleague in military duty, and a stout resistance for a little while was made on the borders, but Berwick soon became the prey of Lord Percy, and Lord Dundaff was killed defending the citadel. Many other places fell, and battles were fought, in which the English were everywhere victorious; for," added Edwin, "none of your generals would draw a sword under the command of Badenoch; and, alarmed at these disasters, the Bishop of Dunkeld is gone to Rome to entreat the Pope to order your return. The Southrons are advancing into Scotland in every direction. They have again landed on the eastern coast, they have possessed themselves of all the border countries, and without your arm to avert the blow, our country must be irretrievably lost."

Edwin had brought letters from Ruthven and the young Earl of Bothwell, to enforce every argument to Wallace for his return. They gave it as their opinion, however, that he must revisit Scotland under an assumed name. Did he come openly, the jealousy of the Scottish lords would be reawakened, and the worst of them might put a finishing stroke to their country by taking him off by assassination or poison. Ruthven and

* Both these curious letters are extant in Hollingshed.

Bothwell, therefore, entreated that, as it was his wisdom as well as his valour their country required, he would hasten to Scotland, and condescend to serve unrecognised till Bruce should be established on the throne.

While Edwin was conducted to the apartments of Lady Helen, Wallace took these letters to his prince. On Bruce being informed of the circumstances in which his country lay, and of the wishes of its most virtuous chiefs for his accession to the crown, he assented to the prudence of their advice with regard to Wallace. "But," added he, "our fortunes must be in every respect, as far as we can mould them, the same. While you are to serve Scotland under a cloud, so will I. At the moment Bruce is proclaimed King of Scotland, Wallace shall be declared its bravest friend. We will go together—as brothers, if you will!" continued he. "I am already considered by the French nobility as Thomas de Longueville; you may personate the Red Reaver: Scotland does not know yet that he was slain; and the reputation of his valour and a certain nobleness in his wild warfare would bring no evil odour to our joint appearance. Were you to wear the title you bear here, a quarrel might ensue between Philip and Edward, which I perceive the former is not willing should occur openly; but the Reaver being considered in England as outlawed by France, no surprise can be excited that he and his brother should fight against Philip's ally. We will, then, assume their characters, and I shall have the satisfaction of serving for Scotland before I claim her as my own. When we drive Edward over the borders, on that day we will throw off our visors, and Sir William Wallace shall place the crown on my head."

Wallace could not but approve the dignity of mind which those sentiments displayed. In the same situation they would have been his own, and he sought not, from any motive of policy, to dissuade Bruce from a delicacy of conduct which drew him closer to his heart. Sympathy of tastes is a pleasing attraction, but congeniality of principles is the cement of souls. This Wallace felt in his new-born friendship with Bruce, and while he talked with him on the fulfilment of their enterprise, he inwardly thanked heaven for blessing him so abundantly. He had found a son in Edwin; a brother and a tender sister in the noble Bruce and lovely Helen.

Bruce received Edwin with a welcome which convinced the youth that he met a friend rather than a rival in the heart

of Wallace. And every preliminary being settled by the three friends respecting their immediate return to Scotland, they repaired to Philip to inform him of Lord Ruthven's despatches, and their consequent resolutions.

The king liked all they said, excepting their request to be permitted to take an early leave of his court. He urged them to wait the return of a second ambassador he had sent to England. Immediately on Wallace's arrival, Philip had despatched a request to the English king, that he would grant the Scots the peace which was their right. Not receiving any answer, he sent another messenger with a more categorical demand. The persevered hostilities of Edward against Scotland explained the delay, but the king yet hoped for a favourable reply, and made such entreaties to Bruce and his friend to remain in Paris till it should arrive that they at last granted a reluctant consent.

At the end of a week the ambassador returned with a conciliatory letter to Philip ; but, affirming Edward's right to Scotland, declared his determination never to lay down his arms till he had again brought the whole realm under his sceptre.

Wallace and his royal friend now saw no reason for lingering in France, and at an early hour next day they took leave of the French king. The queen kissed Helen affectionately, and whispered, while she tied a jewelled collar round her neck, that when she returned she hoped to add to it the coronet of Gascony. Helen's only reply was a sigh, and her eye turned unconsciously on Wallace. He was clad in a plain chain suit of black armour, with a red plume in his helmet—the ensign of the Reaver, whose name he had assumed. All of his former habit that he now wore about him was the sword which he had taken from Edward. At the moment Helen looked towards Wallace, Prince Louis was placing a cross-hilted dagger in his girdle. “My deliverer,” said he, “wear this for the sake of the descendant of St. Louis. It accompanied that holy king through all his wars in Palestine. It twice saved him from the assassin's steel ; and I pray heaven it may prove as faithful to you.”

Soon after this, Douglas and Cummin entered, to pay their parting respects to the king ; and that over, Wallace, taking Helen by the hand, led her forth, followed by Bruce and his friends.

At Havre they embarked for the frith of Tay, and a favourable gale driving them through the Straits of Calais, they launched out into the wide ocean.

CHAPTER LXIII.

SCOTLAND.

THE eighth morning from the day in which the Red Reaver's ship was relaunched from the Norman harbour, Wallace cast anchor under the towers of Dundee.

When Bruce leaped upon the beach, he turned to Wallace and said, with exultation, though in a low voice, "Scotland now receives her king! This earth shall cover me or support my throne!" "It shall support your throne," replied Wallace: "you are come in the power of justice, and that is the power of God. I know Him in whom I bid you confide, for He has been my shield and sword. Trust, my dear prince, where I have trusted, and while virtue is your incense, you need not doubt the issue of your prayers." Bruce grasped the hand of Wallace with fervour, and briefly replied, "Your trust shall be my trust!"

The chiefs did not stay longer at Dundee than was requisite to furnish them with horses to convey them to Perth, where Ruthven still bore sway. When they arrived he was at Huntingtower, and thither they went. The meeting was fraught with mingled feelings. Helen had not seen her uncle since the death of her father, and as soon as the first congratulations were over, she retired to an apartment to weep alone.

On Cummin's being presented to Lord Ruthven, the earl told him he must now salute him as Lord Badenoch, his brother having been killed a few days before in a skirmish on the skirts of Ettrick Forest. Ruthven then turned to welcome the entrance of Bruce, who received from the loyal chief the homage due to his sovereign dignity. Wallace and the prince soon engaged him in a discourse connected with the design of their return, and learned that Scotland did indeed require the royal arm, and the counsel of its best friend. Much of the eastern part of the country was again in the possession of Edward's generals. They had seized on every castle in the lowlands, none having been considered too insignificant to escape their hands. Nor could old age elude the general devastation: and after a dauntless defence of his castle, the veteran knight of Thirlestane had fallen, and with him his only son. On hearing of this disaster, the sage of Ercil-

down, having meanwhile protected Lady Isabella Mar at Learmont, conveyed her northward, but falling sick at Roslyn he had stopped there, and the messenger he despatched to Huntingtower with these calamitous tidings, bore also information that besides several parties of the enemy which were hovering on the heights near Roslyn, an immense army was approaching from Northumberland. Ercildown said he understood that Sir Simon Fraser was hastening forward with a small body to attempt cutting off these advanced squadrons ; but while the contentions continued between Athol and Soulis for the vacant regency, no man could have hope of any steady stand against England.

At this communication, Cummin bluntly proposed himself as the terminator of this dispute. "If the regency were allowed to my brother, as head of the house of Cummin, that dignity now rests with me. Give the word, my sovereign," said he, addressing Bruce, "and none there shall dare to oppose my rights." Ruthven approved this proposal, and Wallace seconded the advice of Ruthven. Thus John Cummin, Lord Badenoch, was invested with the regency, and immediately despatched to the army, to assume it as if in right of his being the next heir to the throne in default of the Bruce.

Wallace sent Lord Douglas privately into Clydesdale, to inform Earl Bothwell of his arrival, and to request his instant presence with the Lanark division and his own troops on the banks of the Esk. Ruthven ascended the Grampians, to call out the numerous clans of Perthshire, and Wallace, with his prince, prepared themselves for meeting these auxiliaries before the towers of Roslyn. Meanwhile, as Huntingtower would be an insecure asylum for Helen, Wallace proposed to Edwin that he should escort his cousin to Braemar, and place her there under the care of his mother and the widowed countess. "Thither," continued he, "we will send Lady Isabella also, should heaven bless our arms at Roslyn." Edwin acquiesced, as he was to return to join his friend on the southern bank of the Forth ; and Helen, aware that fields of blood were no scenes for her, while her heart was wrung to agony at the thought of relinquishing Wallace to new dangers, yielded a reluctant assent.

CHAPTER LXIV.

ROSLYN.

THE day after the departure of Helen, Bruce became impatient to take the field, and Wallace set forth with him to meet Ruthven and his gathered legions.

Having passed along the romantic borders of Invermay, the friends descended the western brow of the Grampians until they approached Loch Earn.

Lord Ruthven immediately espied the prince and Wallace. He joined them ; then marshalling his men, placed himself with the two supposed De Longuevilles in the van, and in this array marched through the valleys of Strathmore and Strathallen into Stirlingshire. After rapid marches they arrived safe at Linlithgow, whence Wallace proposed staying a night to refresh the troops, who were now joined by Alexander Ramsay, at the head of a thousand of his clan. While the men took rest, their chiefs waked to think of them. And Wallace, with Bruce, and Ruthven, and the brave Ramsay (to whom Wallace had revealed himself, but still kept Bruce unknown), were in deep consultation when Grimsby entered to inform his master that a young knight desired to speak with Sir Guy de Longueville. "His name?" demanded Wallace. "He refused to tell," replied Grimsby, "and wears his beaver shut." Wallace looked around with a glance that inquired whether the stranger should be admitted? "Certainly," said Bruce, "but first put on your mask." Wallace closed his visor, and the moment after Grimsby re-entered with a knight of elegant mien, habited in a suit of green armour, linked with gold. He wore a close helmet, from which streamed a long feather of the same hue. Wallace rose at his entrance, the stranger advanced to him. "You are he whom I seek. I am a Scot and a man of few words. Accept my services, allow me to attend you in this war, and I will serve you faithfully." Wallace replied, "And who is the brave knight to whom Sir Guy de Longueville must owe so great an obligation?" "My name," answered the stranger, "shall not be revealed till he who now wears that of the Reaver proclaims his own in the day of victory. I know you, sir, but your secret is as safe with me as in your own breast. Place me to fight by your side and I am yours for ever."

Wallace was surprised. "I have only one question to ask you," replied he, "before I confide a cause dearer to me than

life in your integrity. How did you become master of a secret which I believed out of the power of treachery to betray ? ”

“ No one betrayed your secret to me. I came by my information in an honourable manner, but the means I shall not reveal till I see the time to declare my name, and that, perhaps, may be in the moment when the assumed brother of you young Frenchman,” added the stranger, turning to Bruce and lowering his voice, “ again appears publicly in Scotland as Sir William Wallace.”

“ I am satisfied,” replied he, well pleased that Bruce remained undiscovered ; “ I grant your request. You brave youth, whose name I share, forgives me the success of my sword. I slew the Red Reaver, and would restore a brother to Thomas de Longueville in myself. He fights on my right hand, you shall be stationed on my left.” “ On the side next your heart ! ” exclaimed the stranger, “ let that ever be my post, there to guard the life of the bravest of men.”

This enthusiasm was the usual language of all who approached Sir William Wallace, and Bruce, particularly pleased with the heartfelt energy with which it was uttered, forgot his disguise and half arose to welcome him to his cause, but a look from Wallace arrested his intention, and the prince sat down again, thankful for so timely a check on his precipitancy.

In passing the Pentland Hills into Mid-Lothian, the chiefs were met by Edwin, who had crossed from the north by the frith of Forth. Wallace introduced him to the Knight of the Green Plume, for that was the appellation by which the stranger desired to be known, and then made inquiries how Lady Helen had borne the fatigue of her journey to Braemar. “ Pretty well there,” replied he, “ but much better back again.” He then explained that neither Lady Mar nor his mother would consent to remain so far from the spot where Wallace was to contend again for the safety of their country. Helen did not say anything in opposition to their wishes ; and at last Edwin yielded to the entreaties of his mother and aunt, to bring them to where they might at least not long endure the misery of suspense. Having consented, he set forth with the ladies to Huntingtower, and there left them, under a guard of three hundred men, whom he brought from Braemar for that purpose.

On Edwin’s introduction, the stranger knight engaged himself in conversation with Ramsay. But Lord Ruthven interrupted the discourse, by asking Ramsay some questions

relative to the military positions on the banks of either Esk. Sir Alexander, being the grandson of the Lord of Roslyn, and having passed his youth in its neighbourhood, was well qualified to answer these questions. In such discourses the Scottish leaders marched along, till passing before the lofty ridge of the Corstorphine Hills, they were met by groups of flying peasantry. At sight of the Scottish banners they stopped, and informed their armed countrymen that the new regent, John of Badenoch, having rashly attacked the Southron army on its vantage ground, near Borthwick Castle, had suffered defeat, and was in full and disordered retreat towards Edinburgh, while the country people fled on all sides before the victors. These reporters magnified the number of the enemy to an incredible amount.

Wallace, determining, whether great or small the power of his adversary, to intercept him at Roslyn, sent to Cummin and to Fraser, the two commanders in the beaten armies, to rendezvous on the banks of the Esk. The troops which he led, though ignorant of their real leader, obeyed his directions, under an idea they were Lord Ruthven's, who was their ostensible general, and steadily pursued their march. Every village and cot seemed deserted ; and through an awful solitude they took their rapid way, till the towers of Roslyn Castle hailed them from amidst the wooded heights of the northern Esk. "There," cried Ramsay, "stands the fortress of my forefathers ! It must this day be made famous by the actions performed before its walls !"

Wallace, whose knowledge of this part of the country was not quite so familiar as that of Ramsay, learnt sufficient from him to decide at once which would be the most favourable position for a small and resolute band to assume against a large and conquering army : and accordingly disposing his troops, which did not amount to more than eight thousand men, he despatched one thousand, under the command of Ramsay, to occupy the numerous caves in the southern banks of the Esk, whence they were to issue in various divisions, and with shouts, on the first appearance of advantage, either on his side or on the enemy's.

Ruthven, meanwhile, went for a few minutes into the castle to embrace his niece, and to assure the venerable lord of Roslyn that assistance approached his beleaguered walls.

Edwin, who with Grimsby had volunteered the dangerous

service of reconnoitring the enemy, returned within an hour, bringing in a straggler from the English camp. His life was promised him on condition of his revealing the strength of the advancing army. The terrified wretch did not hesitate; and from him they learnt that it was commanded by Sir John Seagrave and Ralph Confrey, who, deeming the country subdued by the two last battles gained over the Black and Red Cummins, were preparing for a general plundering. And, to sweep the land at once, Seagrave had divided his army into three divisions, to scatter themselves over the country, and everywhere gather in the spoil. To be assured of this being the truth, Edwin went alone into the track he was told the Southrons would take, and from a height discerned about ten thousand of them winding along the valley. With this confirmation of the man's account, he brought him to the Scottish lines, and Wallace, who well knew how to reap advantage from the errors of his enemies, being joined by Fraser and the discomfited regent, made the concerted signal to Ruthven. That nobleman immediately pointed out to his men the waving colours of the Southron host, as it approached beneath the overhanging woods of Hawthornden. He exhorted them, by their fathers, wives, and children, to breast the enemy at this spot; to grapple with him till he fell. "Scotland," cried he, "is lost or won this day. You are freemen or slaves; your families are your own, or the property of tyrants! Fight stoutly, and God will yield you an invisible support."

The Scots answered their general by a shout, and Ruthven placed himself with the regent and Fraser in the van, and led the charge. Little expecting an assault from an adversary they had so lately driven off the field, the Southrons were taken by surprise. But they fought well and stood their ground, till Wallace and Bruce, who commanded the flanking divisions, closed in upon them with an impetuosity that drove Confrey's division into the river. Then the ambuscade of Ramsay poured from his caves, and the Southrons, seeing the surrounding heights and the deep defiles filled with mailed warriors, fled towards their second division, which lay a few miles southward. Thither the Scots followed them. The fugitives, leaping the trenches of the encampment, roused their comrades. Seagrave was soon at the head of his legions, and a battle more desperate than the first blazed over the field. The flying troops of the slain Confrey, rallying round the standard of their general-

in-chief, fought with the spirit of revenge, and being now a body of nearly 20,000 men against 8,000 Scots, the conflict became tremendous. In several points the Southrons gained so greatly the advantage that Wallace and Bruce threw themselves successively into those parts where the enemy most prevailed, and a thousand times turned the fate of the day ; Seagrave was taken and forty English knights beside. The borders of the Esk were dyed with blood, and the enemy were calling for quarter, when of a sudden the cry of " Havoc and St. George ! " issued from the adjoining hill. At the same moment a posse of country people (who, for sake of plunder, had stolen into that part of the English camp which occupied the rear of the height), seeing the advancing troops of a third division of the enemy, rushed down, exclaiming, " We are lost, a host is upon us ! " Terror struck to many a Scottish heart. The Southrons, who were just giving up their arms, leaped upon their feet. The light recommenced with redoubled fury. Sir Robert Neville, at the head of the new reinforcement, charged into the centre of the Scottish legions. Bruce and Edwin threw themselves into the breach which this impetuous onset made, and fighting man to man, would have taken Neville had not a follower of that nobleman, wielding a ponderous mace, struck Bruce so terrible a blow as to fracture his helmet and cast him from his horse to the ground. The fall of so active a leader excited as much dismay in the surrounding Scots as it encouraged the reviving spirits of the enemy. Edwin exerted himself to preserve his prince from being trampled on ; and while he fought for that purpose, and afterwards sent his senseless body off the field, Neville rescued Seagrave and his knights. Lord Ruthven now contended with a feeble arm. Fatigued with the two preceding conflicts, covered with wounds, and perceiving indeed a host pouring upon them on all sides (for the whole of Seagrave's original army of 30,000 men, except those who had fallen in the preceding engagement, were now restored to the assault), the Scots gave ground ; some threw away their arms to fly the faster, and thus redoubled the confusion. Indeed, so great was the havoc, that the day must have ended in the universal destruction of every Scot in the field, had not Wallace felt the crisis, and that as Guy de Longueville he shed his blood in vain. In vain did he rush into the thickest of the carnage ; in vain did he call to his men to stand to the last. He was a foreigner and they had no

confidence in his exhortations ; death was before them and they turned to fly. The fate of his country hung on an instant. The last rays of the setting sun shone full on the rocky promontory of the hill which projected over the field of combat. He took his resolution ; and spurring up the steep ascent, stood on the summit where he could be seen by the whole army, then taking off his helmet he waved it in the air with a shout, and having drawn all eyes upon him, suddenly exclaimed, " Scots ! you have this day vanquished the Southrons twice ! If you be men, remember Cambus-Kenneth, and follow William Wallace to a third victory ! " The cry which issued from the amazed troops was that of a people who beheld the angel of their deliverance. " Wallace ! " was the charge-word of every heart. The hero's courage seemed diffused through every breast ; forming at once into the phalanx his thundering voice dictated, the Southrons again felt the weight of the Scottish steel, and a battle ensued which made the bright Esk run purple to the sea, and covered the pastoral glade of Hawthornden with the bodies of its invaders.

Sir John Seagrave and Neville were both taken, and ere night closed in upon the carnage, Wallace granted quarter to those who sued for it, and receiving their arms, left them to repose in their before depopulated camp.

CHAPTER LXV.

ROSLYN CASTLE.

WALLACE, having planted an adequate force in charge of the prisoners, went to the two Southron commanders to pay them the courtesy he thought due to their bravery and rank, before he retired towards Roslyn Castle. At sight of the warrior who had given them so signal a defeat, the generals rose. Neville, who had received a slight wound in one of his arms, stretched out the other to Wallace. " Sir William Wallace," said he, " that you were obliged to declare a name so deservedly renowned before the troops I led could be made to relinquish one step of their hard-earned advantage, was an acknowledgment in their favour almost equivalent to a victory."

Sir John Seagrave, who stood leaning on his sword with a disturbed countenance, interrupted him. " The fate of this day cannot be attributed to any earthly name or hand. Thirty thousand as brave men as ever crossed the marshes have

fallen before a handful of Scots. Three victories, won over Edward's troops in one day, are not events of a common nature. God alone has been our vanquisher." "I acknowledge it," cried Wallace, "and that He is on the side of justice let the return of St. Matthias' day ever remind your countrymen!"

When Seagrave gave the victory to the Lord of Hosts, he did it more from jealousy of what might be Edward's opinion of his conduct when compared with Neville's, than from any intention to imply that the cause of Scotland was justly heaven-defended. He frowned at the reply of Wallace, and turned gloomily away. Neville returned a respectful answer, and their conqueror soon after left them.

Edwin, with the Knight of the Green Plume (who had approved his valour by many a brave deed performed at his commander's side) awaited Wallace's return from his prisoners' tent. Ruthven came up with Wallace before he joined them, and told him that Bruce was safe under the care of the sage of Ercildown, and that the regent, who had been wounded in the beginning of the day, was also in Roslyn Castle. Wallace then called Edwin to him, giving him orders that all of the survivors who had suffered in these three desperate battles should be collected from amongst the slain and carried into the neighbouring castles of Hawthornden, Brunston, and Dalkeith. The rest of the soldiers were commanded to take their refreshment still under arms. These duties performed, Wallace turned to see how Bruce fared. Wallace ascended the steep acclivity on which Roslyn Castle stands. At the gate of the castle its aged master, the Lord Sinclair, met him to bid him welcome. "Blessed be the saint of this day," exclaimed he, "for thus bringing our best defender, even as by a miracle, to snatch us as a brand from the fire! My gates, like my heart, open to receive the true regent of Scotland." "I have only done a Scotchman's duty," replied Wallace, "and must not arrogate a title which Scotland has transferred to other hands." "Not Scotland, but rebellion," replied the old chief. "It was rebellion against the just gratitude of the nation that invested the Black Cummin with the regency, and only some similar infatuation has bestowed the same title on his brother." "The present Lord Badenoch is an honest and a brave man," replied Wallace, "and as I obey the power which gave him his authority, I am ready by fidelity to him to serve Scotland with as vigorous a zeal as ever; when our rulers cast not

trammels on our virtue we must obey them as the vice-regents of heaven."

Wallace then asked to be conducted to his wounded friend, Sir Thomas de Longueville, for Sinclair was ignorant of the real rank of his guest. Eager to oblige him, his noble host immediately led the way through a gallery, and opening the door of an apartment, discovered to him Bruce, lying on a couch, and a venerable figure, whose silver beard and sweeping robes announced him to be the sage of Ercildown, bathing the wounded chief's temples with balsams. A young creature beautiful as a seraph, also hung over the prostrate chief. She held a casket in her hand, out of which the sage drew the unctions he applied. At the sound of Wallace's voice, who spoke in a suppressed tone to Ruthven while entering the chamber, the wounded prince started on his arm to greet his friend, but he as instantly fell back. Wallace hastened forward. When Bruce recovered from the swoon into which the suddenness of his attempt to rise had thrown him, he felt a hand grasping his; he guessed to whom it belonged, and gently pressing it, smiled; a moment afterwards he opened his eyes, and in a low voice articulated from his wounded lips, "My dear Wallace, you are victorious?" "Completely so, my prince and king," returned he, in the same tone; "all is now plain before you; speak but the word, and render Scotland happy!" "Not yet; oh! not yet," whispered he. "My more than brother, allow Bruce to be himself again before he is known in the land of his fathers! This cruel wound in my head must heal first, and then I may again share your dangers, and your glory! O Wallace! not a Southron must taint our native lands when my name is proclaimed in Scotland." *

Wallace saw that his prince was not in a state to bear argument, and as all had retired far from the couch when he approached it, in gratitude for this propriety (for it had left him and his friend free to converse unobserved), he turned towards the other inmates of the chamber. The sage advanced to him, and recognising in Wallace's manly form the fine youth he had seen with Sir Ronald Crawford at the claiming of the crown, he saluted him with a paternal affection, and then

* It is a curious circumstance, that when the body of Bruce was discovered some years ago in the abbey of Dunfermline, his head retained all its teeth excepting two in front, evidently originally injured by a stroke of violence. Besides this, the evidence remained in the bone of the chest of the fact of its having been cut open after his death, for the heart to be taken out, according to his dying command, to be sent to the Holy Land.

beckoning the beautiful girl who had so compassionately hung over the couch of Bruce, she drew near the sage. He took her hand : " Sir William Wallace," said he, " this sweet child is the youngest daughter of the brave Mar. who died in the field of glory on the Carron. Her grandfather, the stalworth knight of Thirlestane, fell a few weeks ago, defending his castle, and I am almost all that is left to her, though she has or had a sister, of whom we can learn no tidings." Isabella, for it was she, covered her face to conceal her emotions. " Dear lady," said Wallace, " these venerable heroes were both beloved by me. And now that heaven has resumed them to itself, as the last act of friendship that I, perhaps, may be fated to pay to their offspring, I shall convey you to that sister whose heart yearns to receive so dear a consolation."

To disengage Isabella's thoughts from the remembrances now bathing her cheeks with tears, Ercildown put a cup of the mingled juice of herbs into her hand, and commissioned her to give it to their invalid. Wallace now learnt that his friend's wound was not only in the head, accompanied by a severe concussion, but that it must be many days before he could remove from off his bed without danger. Anxious to release him from even the whispers of his companions, who stood at some distance from his couch, Wallace immediately proposed leaving him to rest, and beckoning the chiefs, they followed him out of the apartment.

On the following morning he was aroused at daybreak by the abrupt entrance of Andrew Lord Bothwell into his tent. The well-known sounds of his voice made Wallace start from his pillow, and extend his arms to receive him. " Murray ! my brave, invaluable Murray ! " cried he, " thou art welcome once more to the side of thy brother-in-arms. Thou and thine must ever be first in my heart ! " The young Lord Bothwell returned his warm embrace, and sitting down by Wallace's couch, he grasped his hand. " I feel a happiness which I have never known since the day of Falkirk. You quitted us, Wallace, and all good seemed gone with you, or buried in my father's grave. But you return ! You bring conquest and peace with you, you restore our Helen to her family, you bless us with yourself !—And shall you not see again the gay Andrew Murray ? It must be so, my friend : melancholy is not my climate." " Dear Murray ! " returned Wallace, " this generous enthusiasm can only be equalled

by my joy in all that makes you and Scotland happy." He then proceeded to confide to him all that related to Bruce, and to describe the minutiae of those plans for his establishment, which had only been hinted in his letters from France. Bothwell entered with ardour into these designs and regretted that the difficulty he found in persuading the veterans of Lanark to follow him to any field where they did not expect to find their beloved Wallace, had deprived him of the participation of the late danger and new glory of his friend. "To compensate for that privation," replied Wallace, "while our prince is disabled from pursuing victory in his own person, we must not allow our present advantages to lose their expected effects. You shall accompany me through the Lowlands, where we must recover the places which the ill-fortune of James Cummin has lost."

Murray gladly embraced this opportunity of again sharing the field with Wallace, and the chiefs joined Bruce. Bothwell was presented to his young sovereign, and Douglas entering, the discourse turned on their different posts of duty. Wallace suggested to his royal friend that as his restoration to health could not be so speedy as the cause required, it would be necessary not to await that event, but begin the recovery of the border counties before Edward could reinforce their garrisons. Bruce sighed; but with a generous glow suffusing his pale face, said,—“Go, my friend! Bless Scotland which way you will, and let my ready acquiescence convince future ages that I love my country beyond my own fame; for her sake I relinquish to you the whole glory of delivering her out of the hands of the tyrant who has so long usurped my rights. Men may say when they hear this, that I do not merit the crown you will put upon my head; that I have lain on a couch while you fought for me; but I will bear all obloquy rather than deserve its slightest charge by withholding you an hour from the great work of Scotland's peace.” “It is not for the breath of men, my dear prince,” returned Wallace, “that either you or I act. It is sufficient for us that we effect their good, and whether the agent be one or the other, the end is the same. Our deeds and intentions have one great Judge, and He will award the only true glory.”

Though the wounded John Cummin remained possessed of the title of regent, Wallace was virtually endowed with the authority. Whatever he suggested was acted upon as by a decree. The jealousies which had driven him from his former

supreme seat seemed to have died with their prime instigator, the late regent ; and no chief of any consequence, excepting Soulis and Athol, who had retired in disgust to their castles, breathed a word in opposition to the general gratitude.

Wallace, having dictated his terms and sent his prisoners to England, commenced the march that was to clear the Lowlands of the foe.

CHAPTER LXVI.

BERWICK.

WHILE Wallace was thus carrying all before him from the Grampian to the Cheviot hills, Bruce was rapidly recovering. His eager wishes seemed to heal his wounds ; and on the tenth day after the departure of Wallace he left that couch which had been beguiled of its irksomeness by the attentions of the tender Isabella. The ensuing Sabbath beheld him still more restored ; and having imparted his intentions to the Lords Ruthven and Douglas, who were both with him, the next morning he joyfully buckled on his armour. Isabella, when she saw him thus clad, started, and the roses left her cheek. " I am armed to be your guide to Huntingtower," said he, with a look that showed her he read her thoughts. He then called for pen and ink to write to Wallace. The reassured Isabella held the standish. As he dipped his pen he looked at her with a grateful tenderness that thrilled to her soul, and made her bend her blushing face to hide emotions which whispered bliss in every beat of her happy heart. Thus, with a spirit wrapped in felicity, for victory hailed him from without, and love seemed to woo him to the dearest transports within, he wrote the following letter to Wallace :—

" I am now well, my best friend ! This day I attend my lovely nurse, with her venerable guardian, to Huntingtower. Eastward of Perth, almost every castle of consequence is yet filled by the Southrons, whom the folly of James Cummin allowed to reoccupy the places whence you had so lately driven them. I go to root them out ; to emulate in the north what you are now doing in the south ! You shall see me again when the banks of the Spey are as free as you have made the Forth. In all this I am yet Thomas de Longueville. Isabella, the sweet soother of my hours, knows me as no other, for would she not despise the unfamed Bruce ? To deserve and win her

love as De Longueville, and to marry her as King of Scotland. is the fond hope of your friend and brother Robert——. God speed me, and I shall send you despatches of my proceedings.”

Wallace had just made a successful attack upon the outworks of Berwick when this letter was put into his hand. He was surrounded by his chieftains ; and having read it, he informed them that Sir Thomas de Longueville was going to the Spey to rid its castles of the enemy.

“The hopes of his enterprising spirit,” continued Wallace, “are so seconded by his determination, I doubt not that what he promises, God and the justice of our cause will perform ; and we may soon expect to hear that Scotland has no enemies in her Highlands.”

But in this hope Wallace was disappointed. Day after day passed, and no tidings from the north. He became anxious. Bothwell and Edwin, too, began to share his uneasiness. Continued successes upon Berwick had assured them a speedy surrender, when unexpected succours being thrown in by the sea, the confidence of the garrison became re-excited, and Wallace saw that the only alternative was to take possession of the ships, and turn the siege into a blockade. Still trusting that Bruce would be prosperous in the Highlands, he calculated on full leisure to await the fall of Berwick on this plan ; and so much blood might be spared. Intent and execution were twin-born in the breast of Wallace. By a masterly stroke he effected his design on the shipping, and having closed the Southrons within their walls, he despatched Lord Bothwell to Huntingtower to learn the state of military operations there, and above all to bring back tidings of the prince's health.

On the evening of the very day in which Murray left Berwick, a desperate sally was made by the garrison, but they were beaten back with such effect that Wallace gained possession of one of their most commanding towers. The contest did not end till night ; and after passing some time in the council-tent, he retired to his own quarters at a late hour. At these momentous periods he never seemed to need sleep ; and sitting at his table settling the dispositions for the succeeding day, he marked not the time till the flame of his exhausted lamp expired in the socket. He replenished it, and had again resumed his labours, when the curtain, which covered the door of his tent was drawn aside, and an armed man entered. Wallace looked up, and seeing that it was the Knight of the

Green Plume, asked if anything had occurred from the town. "Nothing," replied the knight, in an agitated voice, and seating himself beside Wallace. "Any evil tidings from Perthshire?" demanded Wallace, who now hardly doubted that ill news had arrived of Bruce. "None," was the knight's reply; "but I am come to fulfil my promise to you: to unite myself for ever to your destiny, or you behold me this night for the last time." Surprised at this address, and the emotion which shook the frame of the unknown warrior, Wallace answered him with expressions of esteem, and added, "If it depend on me to unite so brave a man to my friendship for ever, only speak the word, declare your name, and I am ready to seal the compact." "My name," returned the knight, "will indeed put these protestations to the proof. I have fought by your side, Sir William Wallace: I would have died at any moment to have spared that breast a wound, and yet I dread to raise this visor to show you who I am. A look will make me live or blast me." "Your language confounds me, noble knight," replied Wallace; "I know of no man living, save the base violators of Lady Helen Mar's liberty, who need tremble before my eyes. It is not possible that either of these men is before me; and whoever you are, whatever you may have been, your deeds have proved you worthy of a soldier's friendship, and I pledge you mine."

The knight was silent. He took Wallace's hand—he grasped it; the arms that held it did indeed tremble. Wallace again spoke, "What is the meaning of this? I have power to benefit, but none to injure." "To benefit and to injure!" cried the knight, in a transport of emotion: "you have my life in your hands. Oh! grant it, as you value your own happiness and honour! Look on me, and say whether I am to live or die." As the warrior spoke, he cast himself impetuously on his knees, and threw open his visor. Wallace saw a fine but flushed face. It was much overshadowed by the helmet.

"My friend," said he, attempting to raise him by the hand which clasped his, "your words are mysteries to me; and so little right can I have to the power you ascribe to me, that although it seems to me as if I had seen your features before, yet——" "You forget me!" cried the knight, starting on his feet, and throwing off his helmet to the ground; "again look on this face, and stab me at once by a second declaration that I am remembered no more!"

The countenance of Wallace now showed that he too well remembered it. He was pale and aghast. "Lady Mar," cried he, "not expecting to see you under a warrior's casque—you will pardon me, that when so apparelled I should not immediately recognise the widow of my friend." She gasped for articulation. "And is it thus you answer the sacrifices I have made for you? For you I have committed an outrage on my nature; I have put on me this abhorrent steel; I have braved the dangers of many a hard-fought day, and all to convince you of a love unexampled in woman! And thus you recognise her who has risked honour and life for you—with coldness and reproach!" "With neither, Lady Mar," returned he; "I am grateful for the generous motives of your conduct; but for the sake of the fair fame you confess you have endangered; in respect to the memory of him whose name you bear, I cannot but wish that so hazardous an instance of interest in me had been left undone." "If that is all," returned she, drawing towards him, "it is in your power to ward from me every stigma! Who will dare to cast one reflection on my fair fame when you bear testimony to my purity? Who will asperse the name of Mar when you displace it with that of Wallace? Make me yours, dearest of men," cried she, clasping his hands, "and you will receive one to your heart who never knew how to love before; who will be to you what woman never yet was, and who will endow you with territories nearly equal to those of the King of Scotland. My father is no more; and now, as Countess of Strathearn and Princess of the Orkneys, I have it in my power to bring a sovereignty to your head, and the fondest of wives to your bosom." As she vehemently spoke, and clung to Wallace, as if she had already a right to seek comfort within his arms, her tears and violent agitations so disconcerted him that for a few moments he could not find a reply. This short endurance of her passion aroused her almost drooping hopes, and, intoxicated with so rapturous an illusion, she threw off the little restraint in which awe of Wallace's coldness had confined her, and flinging herself on his breast, poured forth all her love, and fond ambitions for him. In vain he attempted to interrupt her, to raise her with gentleness from her indecorous situation; she had no perception but for the idea which had now taken possession of her heart. "Be but my husband, Wallace, and all rights shall perish before my love and your

aggrandisement. In these arms you shall bless the day you first saw Joanna of Strathearn ! ”

The prowess of the Knight of the Green Plume, the respect he owed to the widow of the Earl of Mar, the tenderness he ever felt for all of womankind, were all forgotten in the disgusting blandishments of this disgrace to her sex. She wooed to be his wife, but her actions and her words were the dictates of a passion impure as it was intemperate. Blinded by its fumes, she forgot the nature of the heart she sought to pervert to sympathy with hers. She saw not that every look and movement on her part filled Wallace with aversion, and not until he forcibly broke from her did she doubt the success of her fond caresses.

“ Lady Mar,” said he, “ I must repeat that I am not ungrateful for the proofs of regard you have bestowed on me ; but such excess of attachment is lavished upon a man that is bankrupt in love. I am cold as marble to every touch of that passion to which I was once but too entirely devoted. Bereaved of the object, I am punished ; thus is my heart doomed to solitude on earth for having made an ideal of the angel that was sent to cheer my path to heaven.” Wallace said even more than this. He remonstrated with her on the shipwreck she was making of her own happiness, in adhering thus tenaciously to a man who could only regard her with the general sentiment of esteem. He urged her beauty and yet youthful years, and how many would be eager to win her love, and to marry her with honour. While he continued to speak to her with the tender consideration of a brother, she, who knew no gradations in the affections of the heart, doubted his words, and believed that a latent fire glowed in his breast which her art might yet blow into a flame. She threw herself upon her knees, she wept, she implored his pity, she wound her arms around his, and bathed his hand with her tears, but still he continued to urge her to relinquish her ill-directed love, to return to her domains before her absence could be generally known. She looked up to read his countenance. A friend’s anxiety, nay, authority, was there, but no glow of passion ; all was calm and determined. Her beauty, then, had been shown to a man without eyes, her tender eloquence poured on an ear that was deaf, her blandishments lavished on a block of marble ! In a paroxysm of despair she dashed the hand she held from

her, and standing proudly on her feet—"Hear me, thou man of stone!" cried she, "and answer me on your life and honour, for both depend on your reply: is Joanna of Strathearn to be your wife?"

"Cease to urge me, unhappy lady," returned Wallace; "you already know the decision of this ever-widowed heart." Lady Mar looked steadfastly on him—"Then receive my last determination!" and drawing near him as if she meant to whisper in his ear, she suddenly plucked St. Louis's dagger from his girdle and struck it into his breast. He caught the hand which grasped the hilt. Her eyes glared with the fury of a maniac, and, with a horrid laugh, she exclaimed, "I have slain thee, insolent triumpher in my love and agonies! Thou shalt not deride me in the arms of thy minion, for I know that it is not for the dead Marion you have trampled on my heart, but for the living Helen!" As she spoke he moved her hold from the dagger, and drew the weapon from the wound. A torrent of blood flowed over his vest, and stained the hand that grasped hers. She turned of a deadly paleness, but a demoniac joy still gleamed in her eyes. "Lady Mar," cried he, while he thrust the thickness of his scarf into the wound, "I pardon this outrage. Go in peace, and I shall never breathe to man nor woman the occurrences of this night. Only remember, that with regard to Lady Helen, my wishes are as pure as her own innocence." "So they may be now, immaculate Wallace!" answered she with bitter derision; "men are saints when their passions are satisfied. Think not to impose on her who knows how this vestal Helen followed you in page's attire, and without one stigma being cast upon her maiden delicacy. I am not to learn the days and the nights she passed alone with you in the woods of Normandy! Did you not follow her to France? Did you not tear her from the arms of Lord Aymer de Valence? and now, relinquishing her yourself, you leave a dishonoured bride to cheat the vows of some honest man! Wallace, I now know you, and as I have been fool enough to love you beyond all woman's love, I swear by the powers of heaven and hell to make you feel the weight of woman's hatred!"

Fire seemed to dart from her scornful eyes, her countenance was torn as by some internal fiend, and with the last malediction thundering from her tongue, she darted from his sight.

CHAPTER LXVII.

THE CAMP.

NEXT morning Wallace was recalled from the confusion into which his nocturnal visitor had thrown his mind by the entrance of Ker, who came, as usual, with the reports of the night. In the course of the communication he mentioned, that about three hours before sunrise, the Knight of the Green Plume had left the camp with his despatches for Stirling. Wallace was scarcely surprised at this ready falsehood of Lady Mar's and, not intending to betray her, he merely said, "Long ere he appears again I hope we shall have good tidings from our friend in the north."

But day succeeded day, and, notwithstanding Bothwell's embassy, no accounts arrived. The countess had left an emissary in the Scottish camp who did as she had done before—intercepted all messengers from Perthshire.

Indeed, from the first of her flight to Wallace to the hour of her quitting him, she had never halted in her purpose from any regard to honour.

Though Wallace heard the denunciation with which she left his presence, yet he did not conceive it was more than the evanescent rage of disappointed passion; and, anticipating persecutions rather from her love than her revenge, he was relieved, and not alarmed, by the intelligence that the Knight of the Green Plume had really taken his departure. More delicate of Lady Mar's honour than she was of her own, when he met Edwin at the works, he silently acquiesced in his belief also, that their late companion was gone with despatches to the regent, who was now removed to Stirling.

After frequent sallies from the garrison, in which the Southrons were always beaten back with great loss, the lines of circumvallation were at last finished, and Wallace hourly anticipated the surrender of the enemy. Reduced for want of provisions, and seeing all succours cut off by the seizure of the fleet, the inhabitants, detesting their new rulers, collected in bands; and lying in wait for the soldiers of the garrison, murdered them secretly, and in great numbers. But here the evil did not end; for by the punishments which the governor thought proper to inflict by lots on the guilty or the guiltless (he not being able to discover who were actually the assassins), the distress of the town was augmented to a horrible

degree. Such a state of things could not be long maintained. Aware that his troops must assuredly perish, either by insurrection within or from the enemy without, the Southron commander determined no longer to wait the appearance of a relief which might never arrive; and he sent a flag of truce to Wallace, accepting and signing his offered terms of capitulation. By this deed he engaged to open the gates at sunset, but begged the interval between noon and that hour to allow him time to settle the animosity between his men and the people before he should surrender his brave followers entirely into the hands of the Scots.

Having despatched his assent to this request of the governor's, Wallace retired to his own tent; and, congratulating himself on such a termination of the siege, he turned with more than usual cheerfulness towards a herald who brought him a packet from the north. Wallace broke the seal; but what was his astonishment to find it a citation for himself to repair immediately to Stirling, "to answer," it said, "certain charges brought against him by an authority too illustrious to be set aside without examination!" He had hardly read this extraordinary mandate when Sir Simon Fraser, his second in command, entered, and, with consternation in his look, put an open letter into his hand. It ran as follows:—

"Sir Simon Fraser,—Allegations of treason against the liberties of Scotland having been preferred against Sir William Wallace, until he clears himself of these charges to the abthanes of Scotland here assembled, you, Sir Simon Fraser, are directed to assume in his stead, the command of the forces which form the blockade of Berwick; and, as the first act of your duty, you are ordered to send the accused towards Stirling, under a strong guard, within an hour after you receive this despatch.

(Signed) "JOHN CUMMIN,

"Earl of Badenoch, Lord Regent of Scotland.

"Stirling Castle."

Wallace returned the letter to Fraser with an undisturbed countenance. "I have received a similar order from the regent," said he; "and though I cannot guess the source whence these accusations spring, I fear not to meet them, and shall require no guard to speed me forward to the scene of my defence. I am ready to go, my friend, and happy

to resign the brave garrison that has just surrendered, to your honour and lenity." Fraser answered that he should be emulous to follow his example in all things, and to abide by his agreements with the Southron governor. He then retired to prepare the army for the departure of their commander, and, much against his feelings, to call out the escort that was to attend the calumniated chief to Stirling.

When the marshal of the army read to the officers and men the orders of the regent, a speechless consternation seized on one part of the troops, and as violent an indignation agitated the other to tumult. The veterans who had followed the chief of Elderslie from the first hour of his appearing in arms, could not brook this aspersion upon their leader's honour; and had it not been for the vehement exhortations of Scrymgeour and Lockhart, they would have risen in instant revolt. Though persuaded to sheath their half-drawn swords, they could not be withheld from marching directly to Wallace's tent. He was conversing with Edwin when they arrived, and, in some measure, he had broken the shock to him of so dishonouring a charge on his friend, by his being the first to communicate it. While Edwin strove to guess who could be the inventor of so dire a falsehood against the truest of Scots, he awakened an alarm in Wallace for Bruce, which could not be excited for himself, by suggesting that perhaps some intimation had been given to the most ambitious of the abthanes, respecting the arrival of their rightful prince. "And yet," returned Wallace, "I cannot altogether suppose that; for even their desire of self-aggrandizement could not torture my share in Bruce's restoration to his country into anything like treason: and all I should dread by a premature discovery of his being in Scotland would be secret machinations against his life. There are men in this land who might attempt it; and it is our duty, my dear Edwin, to suffer death upon the rack rather than betray our knowledge of him. But," added he with a smile, "we need not disturb ourselves with such thoughts—the regent is in our prince's confidence: and did this accusation relate to him, he would not, on such a plea, have arraigned me as a traitor."

Edwin again revolved in his mind the nature of the charge, and who the villain could be who had made it; and, at last, suddenly recollecting the Knight of the Green Plume, he

asked if it were not possible that he, a stranger who had so sedulously kept himself from being known, might be the traitor. "I must confess to you," continued Edwin, "that this knight, who ever appeared to dislike your closest friends, seems to me the most probable instigator of this mischief, and is, perhaps, the author of the strange failure of the communication between you and Bruce! Accounts have not arrived, even since Bothwell went; and that is more than natural. Though brave in his deeds, this unknown may prove only the more subtle spy and agent of our enemies."

Wallace changed colour at these suggestions, but merely replied, "A few hours will decide your suspicion, for I shall lose no time in confronting my accuser." "I go with you," said Edwin, "never, while I live, will I consent to lose sight of you again!"

It was at this moment that the approach of the Lanark veterans was heard from without. The whole band rushed into the tent; and Stephen Ireland, who was foremost, raising his voice above the rest, exclaimed, "They are the traitors, my lord, who accuse you! It is determined by our corrupted thanes, that Scotland shall be sacrificed, and you are to be made the first victim. Think they that we will obey such parricides? Lead us on, thou only worthy of the name of regent, and we will hurl these usurpers from their thrones."

This demand was reiterated by every man present—was echoed by hundreds who surrounded the tent. The Bothwell men and Ramsay's followers joined the men of Lanark, and the mutiny against the orders of the regent became general. Wallace walked out into the open field, and, mounting his horse, rode forth amongst them. At sight of him the air resounded with acclamations, but, stretching out his arm to them in token of silence, they became profoundly still. "My friends and brother soldiers," cried he, "as you value the honour of William Wallace, as you have hitherto done, at this moment yield him implicit obedience." "For ever!" shouted the Bothwell men. "We never will obey any other!" rejoined his faithful Lanark followers; and, with an increased uproar, they demanded to be led to Stirling. His extended hand again stilled the storm, and he resumed: "You shall go with me to Stirling, but as my friends only: never as the enemies of the regent of Scotland. I am charged with treason: it is his duty to try

me by the laws of my country : it is mine to submit to the inquisition. I fear it not, and I invite you to accompany me ;—to witness my acquittal ; and in that my triumph over them, who, through my breast, would strike at what is greater than I.”

At this, every upraised sword dropped before him ; and Wallace, turning his horse into the path which led towards Stirling, his men, with a silent determination to share the fate of their master, fell into regular marching order, and followed him.

At the west of the camp, the detachment appointed to guard Wallace in his arrest came up with him. It was with difficulty that Fraser could find an officer who would command it, and he who did at last consent appeared before his prisoner with downcast eyes, seeming rather the culprit than the guard. Wallace, observing his confusion, said a few gracious words to him, and the officer, more overcome by this than he could have been with reproaches, burst into tears, and retired into the rear of his men.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

STIRLING CASTLE.

WALLACE entered on the Carse of Stirling, that scene of his many victories, and beheld its northern horizon white with tents. An armed cavalcade met him near the Carron, to hold his followers in awe, and to conduct him without opposition to Stirling. In case it should be insufficient to quail their spirit, the regent had summoned all the vassals of the various seigniories of Cummin, and planted them in battle array before the walls of Stirling. But whether they were friends or foes was equally indifferent to Wallace, for, strong in integrity, he went securely forward to his trial ; and, though inwardly marvelling at such a panoply of war being called out to induce him to comply with so simple an act of obedience to the laws, he met the heralds of the regent with as much ease as if they had been coming to congratulate him on the capitulation of Berwick, the ratification of which he brought in his hand.

By his order his followers encamped under Sir Alexander Scrymgeour near Ballochgeich. It was then night. In the morning, at an early hour, Wallace was summoned before the council in the citadel

On his re-entrance into that room which he had left, the dictator of the kingdom, when every knee bent and every head bowed to his mandate, he found not one who greeted his appearance with the commonest courtesy. Badenoch, the regent, sat upon the throne with evident symptoms of being yet an invalid. The Lords Athol and Buchan, and the numerous chiefs of the clans of Cummin, were seated on his right; on his left were arranged the Earls of Fife and Lorn, Lord Soulis, and every Scottish baron of power who at any time had shown himself hostile to Wallace. Others, who were of easy faith to a tale of malice, sat with them; and the rest of the assembly was filled up with men whose names swelled a list without adding any true importance to the side on which they appeared. A few, and those a very few, who still respected Wallace, were present; not because they were sent for (great care having been taken not to summon his friends), but in consequence of a rumour of the charge having reached them, and these were the Lords Lennox and Loch-awe, with Kirkpatrick, and two or three chieftains from the Western Highlands. None of them had arrived till within a few minutes of the council being opened, and Wallace was entering at one door as they appeared at the other. At sight of him a low whisper buzzed through the hall, and a marshal took the plumed bonnet from his hand, which out of respect to the nobility of Scotland, he had raised from his head at his entrance. A herald meanwhile proclaimed, in a loud voice, "Sir William Wallace! you are charged with treason, and, by an ordinance of Fergus the First, you must stand uncovered before the representatives of the majesty of Scotland until that loyalty be proved which would again restore you to a seat amongst her faithful barons."

Wallace, with the same equanimity as that with which he would have mounted the regal chair, bowed his head to the marshal in token of acquiescence. But Edwin, whose indignation was reawakened, at this exclusion of his friend from the privileges of his birth, said something so warm to the marshal that Wallace, in a low voice, was obliged to check his vehemence by a declaration, that, however obsolete the custom, and revived in his case only, it was his determination to submit himself to whatever was exacted of him by the laws of his country.

On Loch-awe and Lennox observing him stand thus before

the bonneted and seated chiefs (a stretch of magisterial prerogative which had not been exercised on a Scottish knight for many a century), they took off their caps, and bowing to Wallace, refused to occupy their places on the benches while the defender of Scotland stood. Kirkpatrick drew eagerly towards him, and throwing down his casque and sword at his feet, cried in a loud voice, "Lie there till the only true man in all this land commands me to take ye up in his defence! He alone had courage to look the Southrons in the face, and to drive their king over the borders, while his present accusers skulked in their chains!" Wallace regarded this ebullition from the heart of the honest veteran with a look that was eloquent to all. He would have animatedly praised such an instance of fearless gratitude expressed to another, and when it was directed to himself his ingenuous soul showed approbation in every feature of his beaming countenance.

"Is it thus, presumptuous knight of Elderslie," cried Soulis, "that by your looks you dare encourage contumely to the lord regent and his peers?" Wallace did not deign him an answer, but turning calmly towards the throne, "Representative of my king!" said he, "in duty to the power whose authority you wear, I have obeyed your summons, and I here await the appearance of the accuser who has had the hardihood to brand the name of William Wallace with disloyalty to prince or people."

The regent was embarrassed. He did not suffer his eyes to meet those of Wallace, but, without reply, turned to Lord Athol, and called on him to open the charge. Athol rose immediately, and, in a bold and positive manner, accused Wallace of having been won over by Philip of France to sell those rights of supremacy to him which, with a feigned patriotism, his sword had wrested from the grasp of England. For this treachery Philip was to endow him with the sovereignty of Scotland, and, as a pledge of the compact, he had invested him with the principality of Gascony in France. "This is the groundwork of his treason," continued Athol; "but the superstructure is to be cemented with our blood. I have seen a list in his own handwriting, in which are the names of those chiefs whose lives are to pave his way to the throne."

At this point of the charge Edwin sprang forward, but Wallace, perceiving the intention of his movement, caught him by the arm, and, by a look, reminded him of his recently repeated engagement to keep silent.

"Produce the list!" cried Lord Lennox. "No evidence that does not bring proof to our eyes ought to have any weight with us against the man who has bled in every vein for Scotland." "It shall be brought to your eyes," returned Athol; "that, and other damning proofs, shall convince this credulous country of its abused confidence." "I see these damning proofs now!" cried Kirkpatrick, who had frowningly listened to Athol; "the abusers of my country's confidence betray themselves at this moment by their eagerness to impeach her friends; and I pray heaven that before they mislead others into so black a conspiracy, the lie in their throats may choke its inventors!" "We all know," cried Athol, turning on Kirkpatrick, "to whom you belong. You were bought with this shameless grant to mangle the body of the slain Cressingham: a deed which has brought a stigma on the Scottish name never to be erased but by the disgrace of its perpetrators. For this savage triumph did you sell yourself to Sir William Wallace; and a bloody champion you are, always ready for your secretly murderous master!"

"Hear you this, and bear it?" cried Kirkpatrick and Edwin in one breath, and grasping their daggers: Edwin's flashed in his hand. "Seize them!" cried Athol; "my life is threatened by his myrmidons." Marshals instantly approached; but Wallace, who had hitherto stood in silent dignity, turned to them and bade them forbear: "Touch these knights at your peril, marshals!" said he; "no man in this chamber is above the laws, and they protect every Scot who resents unjust aspersions upon his own character, or irrelevant and prejudicing attacks on that of an arraigned friend. It is before the majesty of the law that I now stand; but were injury to usurp its place, not all the lords in Scotland should detain me a moment in a scene so unworthy of my country."

Athol saw that none in the assembly had courage to enforce this act of violence, and blazing with fury, he poured his whole wrath upon Wallace. "Imperious, arrogant traitor!" cried he, "this presumption only deepens our impression of your guilt! Demean yourself with more reverence to this august court, or expect to be sentenced on the proof which such insolence amply gives; we require no other to proclaim your domineering spirit, and at once to condemn you as the premeditated tyrant of our land." "Lord Athol," replied Wallace, "what is just I would say in the

face of all the courts in Christendom. It is not in the power of man to make me silent when I see the laws of my country outraged and my countrymen oppressed ; though I may submit my own cheek to the blow, I will not permit theirs to share the stroke. I have answered you, earl, to this point, and am ready to hear you to the end."

Athol resumed. "I am not your only accuser, you shall see one whose truth cannot be doubted, and whose first glance will cover that bold front with the livery of shame ! My lord," cried he, turning to the regent, "I shall bring a most illustrious witness before you ; one who will prove on oath that it was the intention of this arch-hypocrite, this angler for women's hearts, this perverter of men's understandings, before another moon to bury deep in blood the very people whom he now insidiously affects to protect ! But to open your and the nation's eyes at once, to overwhelm him with his fate, I now call forth the evidence."

The marshals opened a door in the side of the hall, and led a lady forward, habited in regal splendour, and covered from head to foot with a veil of so transparent a texture that her costly apparel and majestic contour were distinctly seen through it. She was conducted to a chair on an elevated platform. The regent rose, and in a tremulous voice addressed her—

"Joanna, Countess of Strathearn and Mar, Princess of the Orkneys, we adjure thee by thy princely dignity, and in the name of the King of kings, to bear a just witness to the truth or falsehood of the charges of treason and conspiracy now brought against Sir William Wallace."

The name of his accuser made Wallace start ; and the sight of her unblushing face, overspread his cheek with a tinge of that shame for her which she was now too hardened to feel herself. Edwin gazed at her in speechless horror ; while she, casting a glance at Wallace, in which the full purpose of her soul was declared, turned, with a softened though majestic air, to the regent, and spoke :—

"My lord," said she, "you see before you a woman who never knew what it was to feel a self-reproachful pang till an evil hour brought her to receive an obligation from that insidious man. But as my first passion has ever been the love of my country, I will prove it to this assembly by making a confession of what was once my heart's weakness ; and by that candour, I trust they will honour the rest of my narrative."

A clamour of approbation resounded through the hall. Lennox and Loch-awe looked on each other with amazement. Kirkpatrick, recollecting the scenes at Dumbarton, exclaimed—"Jezebel!"—but the ejaculation was lost in the general applause; and the countess, opening a paper which she held in her hand, in a calm voice, but with a flushing cheek, resumed:—

"I shall read my further deposition. I have written it, that my memory might not err, and that my country may be unquestionably satisfied of the accuracy of every syllable I utter."

She paused an instant, drew a quick breath, and proceeded, reading from the paper:—

"I am not to tell you, my lord, that Sir William Wallace twice released the late Earl of Mar and myself from captivity. Our deliverer was what you see him: fraught with attractions, which he too successfully directed against the peace of a young woman married to a man of paternal years. I revered my nuptial vow too sincerely to listen to him with the complacency he wished; but, I blush to own, that his agonies of love, his manly graces, and the virtues I believed he possessed (for well he knows to feign!), co-operating with my gratitude, at last wrought such a change in my breast that—I became wretched. No guilty wish was there; but an admiration of him, a pity which undermined my health, and left me miserable! I forbade him to approach me. I tried to wrest him from my memory, and nearly had succeeded, when I was informed by my late husband's nephew (the youth who now stands beside Sir William Wallace), that he was returned under an assumed name from France. Then I feared that all my inward struggles were to recommence. I had once conquered myself; for, abhorring the estrangement of my thoughts from my lord, when he died I yearned to appease my conscience, and in penance for my involuntary crime I refused Sir William Wallace my hand. His return to Scotland filled me with tumults. Edwin Ruthven left me at Huntingtower, and that very evening, while walking alone in the garden, I was surprised by an armed man. He threw a scarf over my head to prevent my screams, but I fainted with terror. He then took me from the garden by the way he had entered, and placing me on a horse before him, carried me whither I know not; but on my recovery I found myself in a chamber, with a woman standing beside me, and the same warrior. His visor was so closed that I could not see his face.

On my expressing alarm at my situation, he addressed me in French, telling me he had provided a man to carry an excuse to Huntingtower, to prevent pursuit ; and then he put a letter into my hand, which, he said, he brought from Sir William Wallace. Believing that a man who had sworn to me devoted love could not premeditate a serious outrage, I broke the seal, and, nearly as I can recollect, read to this effect :—

“That his passion was so imperious he had determined to make me his in spite of those sentiments of female delicacy which, while they tortured him, rendered me dearer in his eyes. He told me that as he had often read in my blushes the sympathy which virtue made me conceal, he would now wrest me from my widowhood, and having nothing in reality to reproach myself with, compel me to be happy. His friend, the only confidant of his love, had brought me to a spot whence I could not fly, there I should remain till he, Wallace, could leave the army for a few days, and throwing himself on my compassion and tenderness, be received as the most faithful of lovers, the fondest of husbands.’

“This letter,” continued the countess, “was followed by many others ; and the latent affection in my heart, and his subduing love, were too powerful in his cause. How his letters were conveyed I know not, but they were duly presented to me by the woman who attended me. At last the knight who had brought me to the place, and who wore green armour and a green plume, reappeared.” “Villain !” broke from the lips of Edwin. The countess turned her eye on him for a moment, and then resumed : “He was the warrior who had borne me from Huntingtower, and from that hour until the period I now speak of, I had never seen him. He put another packet into my hand, desiring me to peruse it with attention, and return Sir William Wallace a verbal answer by him. Yes ! was all he required. I retired to open it ; and what was my horror, when I read a perfect development of the treason for which he is now brought to account ! By some mistake of my character, he had conceived me to be ambitious ; and knowing himself to be the master of my heart, he fancied himself lord of my conscience also. He wrote, that until he saw me, he had no other end in his exertions for Scotland than her rescue from a foreign yoke ; but, added he, ‘from the moment in which I first beheld my adored Joanna, I aspired to place a crown on her brows.’

He then told me that he did not deem the time of its presentation to him on the Carse of Stirling a safe juncture for its acceptance; neither was he tempted to run the risk of maintaining an unsteady throne when I was not free to partake it; but since the death of Lord Mar, every wish was re-awakened, and he determined to become a king. Philip of France had made secret articles with him to that end. He was to hold Scotland of him. While to make the surrender of his country's independence sure to Philip, and its sceptre to himself and his posterity, he attempted to persuade me there would be no crime in destroying the chiefs whose names he enrolled in this list. The Pope, he added, would absolve me from a transgression dictated by connubial duty; and, on our bridal day, he proposed the deed should be done. He would invite all these lords to a feast, and poison, or the dagger should lay them at his feet.

"So impious a proposal restored me to myself. My love turned to abhorrence; and hastening to the Knight of the Green Plume, I told him to carry my resolution to his master that I would never see him more till I should appear as his accuser before the tribunal of his country. The knight tried to dissuade me from my purpose, but in vain; and at last, becoming alarmed at the punishment which might overtake himself as the agent of such treason, he confessed to me that the scene of his first appearance at Linlithgow was devised by Wallace, who had brought him from France to assist in the scheme he durst not confide to Scotland's friends. If I would guarantee his life, he offered to take me from the place where I was then confined, and convey me safe to Stirling. All else that he asked was, that I would allow him to be the bearer of the casket which contained Sir William Wallace's letters, and suffer my eyes to be blindfolded during the first part of our journey. This I consented to do; but the murderous list I had undesignedly put into my bosom. My head was again wrapped in a thick veil, and we set out. It was very dark, and we travelled long and swiftly till we came to a wood. There was neither moon nor stars to point out any habitation. But being overcome with fatigue, my conductor persuaded me to dismount and take rest. I slept beneath the trees. In the morning when I awoke I in vain looked around for the knight; he was gone, and I saw him no more. I then explored my way to Stirling to

warn my country of its danger—to unmask to the world the direst hypocrite that ever prostituted the name of virtue.”

The countess ceased, and a hundred voices broke out at once, pouring invectives on the traitorous ambition of Sir William Wallace, and invoking the regent to pass some signal condemnation on so monstrous a crime. In vain Kirkpatrick thundered forth his indignant soul; he was unheard in the tumult; but going up to the countess, he accused her to her face of falsehood, and charged her with a design, from some really treasonable motive, to destroy the only sure hope of her country.

“And will you not speak?” cried Edwin, in agony of spirit clasping Wallace’s arm; “will you not speak before these ungrateful men dare to brand your name with infamy? Make yourself heard! Confute that wicked woman, who too surely has proved what I suspected—that this self-concealing knight came to be a traitor.” “I will speak, Edwin,” returned Wallace, “at the proper moment, but not in this tumult of my enemies. Rely on it, your friend will submit to no unjust decree.”

“Where is this Knight of the Green Plume?” cried Lennox, almost startled in his opinion of Wallace by the consistency of the countess’s narrative. “No mark of dishonour shall be passed on Sir William Wallace without the strictest scrutiny. Let the mysterious stranger be found, and confronted with Lady Strathearn.” Notwithstanding the earl’s insisting on impartial justice, she perceived the doubt in his countenance, and eager to maintain her advantage, replied—“The knight, I fear, has fled beyond our search; but that I may not want a witness to corroborate the love I once bore this arch-hypocrite, and, consequently, the sacrifice I make to loyalty in thus unveiling him to the world, I call upon you, Lord Lennox, to say whether you did not observe at Dumbarton Castle the state of my too grateful heart?”

Lennox, who well remembered her conduct in that fortress, hesitated to answer, aware that his reply might substantiate a guilt which he now feared would be but too strongly made manifest. Every ear hung on his answer. Wallace saw what was passing in his mind, and, determined to allow all men to show what was in their hearts, he looked towards the earl, and said, “Do not hesitate, my lord; speak all that you know or think of me. Could my breast be laid open for man to scan,

I should be content, for then Scotland would know me as my Creator knows me, and the evidence which now makes even friendship doubt would meet the reception due to calumny."

Lord Lennox felt the last remark, and stung with remorse for having for a moment credited anything against the frank spirit which gave him this permission, he replied, "To Lady Strathearn's questions I must answer, that at Dumbarton I did perceive her preference to Sir William Wallace, but I never saw anything in him to warrant the idea that it was reciprocal. And yet, were it even so, that bears nothing to the point of the countess's accusations; and, notwithstanding her princely rank, and the deference all would pay to the widow of Lord Mar, as true Scots, we cannot relinquish to a single witness our faith in a man who has so eminently served his country."

"No!" cried Loch-awe; "if the Knight of the Green Plume be above ground he shall be brought before this tribunal. He alone can be the traitor; and to destroy us by exciting suspicions against our best defender, he has wrought with his own false pen this device to deceive the patriotic widow of the Earl of Mar." "No, no!" interrupted she; "I read the whole in his own—to me too well-known—handwriting; and this list of the chiefs, condemned by yon traitor to die, shall fully evince his guilt. Even your name, too, generous earl, is in the horrid catalogue." While she spoke she rose eagerly to hand to him the scroll.

"Let me now speak, or stab me to the heart!" hastily whispered Edwin to his friend. Wallace did not withhold him, for he guessed what would be the remark of his ardent soul. "Hear that woman!" cried the vehement youth to the regent, "and say whether she now speaks the language of one who had ever loved the virtues of Sir William Wallace? Were she innocent of malice towards the deliverer of Scotland, would she not have rejoiced in Loch-awe's suggestion, that the Green Knight is the traitor? Or, if that scroll she has now given into the regent's hand be too nicely forged for her to detect its not being indeed the handwriting of the noblest of men, would she not have shown some sorrow at least at being obliged to maintain the guilt of one she professes once to have loved?—of one who saved herself, her husband, and her child, from perishing! But here her malice has overstepped her art, and after having promoted the success

of her tale by so mingling insignificant truths with falsehoods of capital import—that in acknowledging the one we seem to grant the other—she falls into her own snare! Even a beardless boy can now discern that, however vile the Green Knight may be, she shares his wickedness!”

While Edwin spoke, Lady Strathearn's countenance underwent a thousand changes. Twice she attempted to rise and interrupt him, but Sir Roger Kirkpatrick having fixed his eyes on her with a menacing determination to prevent her, she found herself obliged to remain quiescent. Full of a newly-excited fear that Wallace had confided to her nephew the last scene in his tent, she started up as he seemed to pause, and with assumed mildness, again addressing the regent, said—that before this apparently ingenuous defence could mislead impartial minds she thought it just to inform the council of the infatuated attachment of Edwin Ruthven to the accused, for she had ample cause to assert that the boy was so bewitched by his commander—who had flattered his youthful vanity by loading him with distinctions only due to approved valour in manhood, that he was ready at any time to sacrifice every consideration of truth, reason and duty, to please Sir William Wallace.

“Such may be in a boy,” observed Lord Loch-awe, interrupting her; “but as I know no occasion in which it is possible for Sir William Wallace to falsify the truth, I call upon him, in justice to himself and to his country, to reply to three questions!” Wallace bowed to the venerable earl, and he proceeded: “Sir William Wallace, are you guilty of the charge brought against you, of a design to mount the throne of Scotland by means of the King of France?”

Wallace replied, “I never designed to mount the throne of Scotland, either by my own means or by any other man's.”

“Was this scroll, containing the names of certain Scottish chiefs noted down for assassination, written by you, or under your connivance?”

“I never saw the scroll, nor heard of the scroll, until this hour. And harder than death is the pang at my heart when a Scottish chief finds it necessary to ask me such a question regarding a people to save even the least of whom he has so often seen me risk my life!”

“Another question,” replied Loch-awe, “and then, bravest of men, if your country acquits you not in thought and deed Campbell of Loch-awe sits no more amongst its judges! What

is your knowledge of the Knight of the Green Plume, that, in preference to any Scottish friend, you should entrust him with your wishes respecting the Countess of Strathearn ? ”

Wallace's answer was brief : “ I never had any wishes respecting the wife or the widow of my friend the Earl of Mar that I did not impart to every chief in the camp, and those wishes went no further than for her safety. As to love, that is a passion I shall know no more ; and Lady Strathearn alone can say what is the end she aims at, by attributing feelings to me with regard to her which I never conceived, and words which I never uttered. Like this passion, with which she says she inspired me,” added he, turning his eyes steadfastly on her face, “ was the Knight of the Green Plume ! You are all acquainted with the manner of his introduction to me at Linlithgow. By the account that he then gave of himself, you all know as much of him as I did, till on the night that he left me at Berwick, and then I found him, like this story of Lady Strathearn, all a fable ! ”

“ What is his proper title ? Name him, on your knight-hood ! ” exclaimed Buchan ; “ for he shall yet be dragged forth to support the veracity of my illustrious kinswoman, and to fully unmask his insidious accomplice ! ”

“ Your kinswoman, Earl Buchan,” replied Wallace, “ can best answer your question.”

Lord Athol approached the regent, and whispered something in his ear. This unworthy representative of the generous Bruce, immediately rose from his seat. “ Sir William Wallace,” said he, “ you have replied to the questions of Lord Loch-awe, but where are your witnesses to prove that what you have spoken is the truth ? ”

Wallace was struck with surprise at this address from a man who, whatever might be demanded of him in the fulfilment of his office, he believed could not be otherwise than his friend ; because, from the confidence reposed in him both by Bruce and himself, he must be fully aware of the impossibility of these allegations being true. But Wallace's astonishment was only for a moment ; he now saw with an eye that pierced through the souls of the whole assembly, and, with collected firmness, he replied, “ My witnesses are in the bosom of every Scotsman.”

“ I cannot find them in mine ! ” interrupted Athol. “ Nor in mine ! ” was echoed from various parts of the hall.

“ Invalidate the facts brought against you by legal evidence, not a mere rhetorical appeal, Sir William Wallace,” added the regent, “ else the sentence of the law must be passed on so tacit an acknowledgment of guilt.”

“ Acknowledgment of guilt ! ” cried Wallace, a flush of indignation suffusing his noble brow. “ If any one of the chiefs who have just spoken knew the beat of an honest heart, they would not have declared that they heard no voice proclaim the integrity of William Wallace. Let them look out on yon Carse, where they saw me refuse that crown, offered by themselves, which my accuser alleges I would yet obtain by their blood. Let them remember the banks of the Clyde, where I rejected the Scottish throne offered me by Edward ! Let these facts bear witness for me ; and, if they be insufficient, look on Scotland, now, for the third time, rescued by my arm from the grasp of an usurper ! That scroll locks the door of the kingdom upon her enemies.” As he spoke he threw the capitulation of Berwick upon the table. It struck a pause into the minds of the lords—they gazed without a word, on the parchment where it lay, while he proceeded—“ If my actions that you see, do not convince you of my integrity, then believe the unsupported evidence of words, the tale of a woman, whose mystery, were it not for the memory of the honourable man whose name she once bore, I would publicly unravel : believe her ! and leave Wallace naught of his country to remember, but that he has served it, and that it is unjust ! ”

“ Noblest of Scots ! ” cried Loch-awe, coming towards him, “ did your accuser come in the shape of an angel of light, still we should believe your life in preference to her testimony, for God Himself speaks on your side. ‘ My servants,’ He declares, ‘ shall be known by their fruits ! ’ And have not yours been peace to Scotland and good-will to men ? ” “ They are the serpent-folds of his hypocrisy ! ” cried Athol, alarmed at the awe-struck looks of the assembly. “ They are the baits by which he cheats fools ! ” re-echoed Soulis. “ They are snares which shall catch us no more ! ” was now the general acclamation ; and in proportion to the respect which had made them bow, though but for a moment, to virtue, they now vociferated their contempt both for Wallace and this his last achievement. Inflamed with rage at the manifest determination to misjudge his commander,

and maddened at the contumely with which their envy affected to treat him, Kirkpatrick threw off all restraint, and with the bitterness of his reproaches, still more incensed the jealousy of the nobles and augmented the tumult. Lennox, vainly attempting to make himself heard, drew towards Wallace, hoping, by that movement, to at least show on whose side he thought justice lay. At this moment, while the uproar raged with redoubled clamour—the one party denouncing the Cummins as the source of this conspiracy against the life of Wallace, the other demanding that sentence should instantly be passed upon him as a traitor—the door burst open, and Bothwell, covered with dust, and followed by a throng of armed knights, rushed into the centre of the hall.

“Who is it you arraign?” cried the young chief, looking indignantly around him. “Is it not your deliverer you would destroy? Has he not plucked you this third time out of the furnace that would have consumed you? And yet in this hour you would sacrifice him to the disappointed passions of a woman! Falsest of thy sex!” cried he, turning to the countess, who shrunk before the penetrating eyes of Andrew Murray; “do I not know thee! Have I not read thine unfeminine, vindictive heart? You would destroy the man you could not seduce! Wallace!” cried he, “speak. Would not this woman have persuaded you to disgrace the name of Mar? When my uncle died, did she not urge you to intrigue for that crown which she knew you had so loyally declined?” “My errand here,” answered Wallace, “is to defend myself, not to accuse others. I have shown that I am innocent, and my judges will not look on the proofs. They obey not the laws in their judgment, and whatever may be the decree, I shall not acknowledge its authority.” As he spoke, he turned away, and walked with a firm step out of the hall.

His disappearance gave the signal for a tumult more threatening to the welfare of the state, than if the armies of Edward had been in the midst of them. It was brother against brother, friend against friend. The Lords Lennox, Bothwell, and Loch-awe were vehement against the unfairness with which Sir William Wallace had been treated. Kirkpatrick declared that no arguments could be used with men so devoid of reason, and words of reproach and reviling passing on all sides, swords were fiercely drawn. The Countess of Strathearn, seeing herself neglected by even her friends in

the strife, and fearful that the party of Wallace might at last gain the ascendancy, and that herself might meet their hasty vengeance, rose abruptly, and giving her hand to a herald, hurried out of the assembly.

CHAPTER LXIX.

BALLOCHGEICH.

THE marshals with difficulty interrupted the attack which the enemies and friends of Wallace made on each other ; several of the Cummins were maimed, Lord Athol himself was severely wounded by Kirkpatrick, but the treacherous regent gladly saw that none on his side were hurt unto death. With menaces the two parties separated, the one to the regent's apartments, the other to the camp of Wallace.

Lord Bothwell found him encircled by his veterans, in whose breasts he was trying to allay the storm raging there against the injustice of the regent and the ingratitude of the Scottish lords. At sight of Bothwell, their clamour to be led instantly to revenge the indignity offered to their general redoubled, and Murray, not less incensed, turning to them exclaimed,—“ Yes, my friends, keep quiet for a few hours, and then, what honour commands we will do ! ” At this assurance they retired to their quarters, and Bothwell turned with Wallace into his tent.

“ Before you utter a word concerning the present scenes,” cried Wallace, “ tell me, how is the hope of Scotland ? the only earthly stiller of these horrid tumults ? ” “ Alas ! ” replied Bothwell. “ After regaining every fortress north of the Forth, his last and greatest achievement was making himself master of Scone ; but in storming its walls a fragment of stone falling heavily, terribly rent the muscles of his breast, and he now lies at Huntingtower reduced to infant weakness. All this you would have known had you received his letters, but villany must have been widely at work, for none of yours have reached his hands.” This intelligence respecting Bruce was a more mortal blow to Wallace than all he had just sustained in his own person. He remained silent, but his mind was thronged with thoughts. Was Scotland to be indeed lost ? Was all that he had suffered and achieved to have been done in vain ? and should he be fated to behold her again made a sacrifice to the jealous rivalry of her selfish and contending nobles ?

Bothwell continued to speak of the prince, and added, that it was with reluctance he had left him, even to share the anticipated success at Berwick. But Bruce, impatient to learn the issue of the siege (as still no letters arrived from that quarter), had despatched him back to the borders. At Dunfermline he was stricken with horror by the information that treason had been alleged against Wallace, and turning his steps westward, he flew to give that support to his friend's innocence which the malignity of his enemies might render needful.

"The moment I heard how you were beset," continued Bothwell, "I despatched a messenger to Lord Ruthven, warning him not to alarm Bruce with such tidings, but to send hither all the spare forces in Perthshire to maintain you in your rights." "No force, my dear Bothwell, must be used to hold me in a power which now would only keep alive a spirit of discord in my country. If I dare apply the words of my Divine Master, I would say, *I came not to bring a sword but peace to the people of Scotland*. Then, if they are weary of me, let me go. Bruce will recover, they will rally round his standard, and all will be well." "Oh, Wallace! Wallace!" cried Bothwell; "the scene I have this day witnessed is enough to make a traitor of me. I could forswear my country—I could immolate its ungrateful chieftains on those very lands which your generous arm restored to these worthless men?" He threw himself into a seat, and leaned his burning forehead against his hand—"Cousin, you declare my sentiments," rejoined Edwin; "my soul can never again associate with these sons of envy. I cannot recognise a countryman in any one of them; and, should Sir William Wallace quit a land so unworthy of his virtues, where he goes I will go—his asylum shall be my country, and Edwin Ruthven will forget that he ever was a Scot." "Never!" cried Wallace, turning on him one of those looks which struck conviction into the heart. "*Is man more just than God?*" Though a thousand of your countrymen offend you by their crimes, yet while there remains one honest Scot, for his sake and his posterity it is your duty to be a patriot. A nation is one great family, and every individual in it is as much bound to promote the general good as a brother or a father to maintain the welfare of his nearest kindred. And if the transgression of one son be no excuse for the omission of another, in like manner, the ruin these turbulent lords

would bring upon Scotland is no excuse for your desertion of your interest. I would not leave the helm of my country did she not thrust me from it ; but though cast by her into the waves, would you not blush for your friend should he wish her other than a peaceful haven ? ” Edwin spoke not, but putting the hand of Wallace to his lips left the tent. “ Oh ! ” cried Bothwell, looking after him, “ that the breast of woman had but half that boy’s tenderness ! And yet all of that dangerous sex are not like this hyena-hearted Lady Strathearn. Tell me, my friend, did she not, when she disappeared so strangely from Huntingtower, fly to you ? I now suspect, from certain remembrances, that she and the Green Knight are one and the same person. Acknowledge it and I will unmask her at once to the court she has deceived.” “ She has deceived no one,” replied Wallace. “ Before she spoke, the members of that court were determined to brand me with guilt, and her charge merely supplied the place of others which they would have devised against me. Whatever she may be, my dear Bothwell, for the sake of him whose name she once bore, let us not expose her to open shame. Her love or her hatred are alike indifferent to me now, for to neither of them do I owe that innate malice of my countrymen which has only made her calumny the occasion of manifesting their resolution to make me infamous. But that, my friend, is beyond her compass. I have done my duty to Scotland, and that conviction must live in every honest heart—ay, and with the dishonest too—for did they not fear my integrity they would not have thought it necessary to deprive me of power. Heaven shield our prince ! I dread that Badenoch’s next shaft may be at him ! ” “ No,” cried Bothwell, “ all is levelled at his best friend. I taxed the regent with disloyalty for permitting this outrage on you, and his answer was : *Wallace’s removal is Bruce’s security ; who will acknowledge him when they know that this man is his dictator ?* Wallace sighed at this reply, which only confirmed him in his resolution, and he told Bothwell that he saw no alternative, if he wished to still the agitations of his country, and preserve its prince from premature discovery, but to indeed remove the subject of all these contentions from their sight. “ Attempt it not ! ” exclaimed Bothwell ; “ propose but a step towards that end, and you will determine me to avenge my country, at the peril of my own life,

on all in that accursed assembly who have menaced yours !” In short, the young earl’s denunciations were so earnest against the lords in Stirling that Wallace, thinking it dangerous to exasperate him further, consented to remain in his camp till the arrival of Ruthven should bring him the advantage of his counsel.

The issue showed that Bothwell was not mistaken. The majority of the Scottish nobles envied Wallace his glory, and hated him for that virtue which drew the eyes of the people to compare him with their selfish courses. The regent, hoping to become the first in Bruce’s favour, was not less urgent to ruin the man who so deservedly stood the highest in that prince’s esteem. He had therefore entered warmly into the project of Lady Strathearn. But when, during a secret conference between them, previous to her open charge of Wallace, she named Sir Thomas de Longueville as one of his foreign emissaries, Cummin observed, “If you would have your accusation succeed do not mention that knight at all. He is my friend. He is now ill, near Perth, and must know nothing of this affair till it be over. Should he live, he will nobly thank you for your forbearance ; should he die, I will repay you as becomes your nearest kinsman.” All were thus united in one determined effort to hurl Wallace from his station in the state. But when they believed that done, they quarrelled amongst themselves in deciding who was to fill the great military office which his prowess had now rendered a post rather of honour than of danger.

In the midst of these feuds Sir Simon Fraser abruptly appeared in the council-hall. His countenance proclaimed his tidings. Lennox and Loch-awe listened with something like exultation to his suddenly disastrous information. When the English governor at Berwick learned the removal of Wallace from his command, and the consequent consternation of the Scottish troops, instead of surrendering at sunset as was expected, he sallied out at the head of the whole garrison, and attacking the Scots by surprise, gave them a total defeat. Every outpost around the town was re-taken by the Southrons, the army of Fraser was cut to pieces or put to flight, and himself now arriving at Stirling, smarting with many a wound but more under his dishonour, to show to the regent of Scotland the evil of having superseded the only man whom the enemy feared. The council stood in silence, staring at each other ; and, to add to their dismay, Fraser had hardly completed his narration, before a messenger from Teviotdale arrived to inform the

regent that King Edward was himself within a few miles of the Cheviots ; and, from the recovered position of Berwick, must have even now poured his thousands over those hills upon the plains beneath. While all in the citadel was indecision and alarm, Lennox hastened to Wallace's camp with the news.

Lord Ruthven and the Perthshire chiefs were already there. They had arrived early in the morning with unpromising tidings of Bruce. The state of his wound had induced a constant delirium. But still Wallace clung to the hope that his country was not doomed to perish—that its prince's recovery was only protracted. In the midst of this anxiety, Lennox entered, and relating what he had just heard, turned the whole current of his auditor's ideas. Wallace started from his seat. His hand mechanically caught up his sword, which lay upon the table. Lennox gazed at him. "There is not a man in the citadel," cried he, "who does not appear at his wit's end, and incapable of facing this often-beaten foe. Will you, Wallace, again condescend to save a country that has treated you so ungratefully?" "I would die in its trenches!" cried the chief, a generous forgiveness of all his injuries suffusing his magnanimous heart.

Lord Loch-awe soon after appeared, and corroborating Lennox, added that on the regent's sending word to the troops, that in consequence of the treason of Sir William Wallace, the supreme command was taken from him, and they must immediately march out, under the orders of Sir Simon Fraser, to face the enemy, they began to murmur among themselves, saying, that since Wallace was found to be a traitor, they knew not whom to trust, but it certainly should not be a beaten general. With these whisperings they slid away from their standards, and when Loch-awe left them, were dispersing on all sides like an already discomfited army.

CHAPTER LXX.

ARTHUR'S SEAT.

For a day or two ruin seemed imminent. A large detachment from the royal army had entered Scotland by Berwick, and, headed by De Warenne, was advancing towards Edinburgh. Seeing the danger of the realm, and hearing from the Lords Ruthven and Bothwell that their troops would follow no other leader than Wallace, and hopeless of any prompt decision

from the Council, Badenoch yielded assent to the only apparent means of saving his country. He turned pale, while his silence granted to Lord Loch-awe the necessity of imploring Sir William Wallace to again stretch out his arm in their behalf. Wallace, branded as the intended betrayer of Scotland, was solicited by his very accusers to assume the trust of their defence!

"Such is the triumph of virtue!" whispered Edwin to his friend, as he vaulted on his horse. A luminous smile from Wallace acknowledged that he felt the tribute, and, looking up to heaven, he said, "Thence comes my power, and the satisfaction it brings, whether attended by man's applause or his blame, he cannot take from me. I now, perhaps for the last time, arm for Scotland. May the God in whom I trust again crown me with victory, and for ever after bind the brows of our rightful sovereign with peace!"

While Wallace pursued his march, the regent was quite confounded, hardly knowing whether to collect forces for the support of their former leader, or to await in inactivity the issue of the expected battle. He knew not how to act, but a letter from Lady Strathearn decided him.

Though partly triumphant in her charges, the accusations of Bothwell had disconcerted her, and though the restoration of Wallace to undisputed authority seemed to her next to impossible, still she resolved to take another step to confirm her influence over the discontented of her country, and most likely to ensure the vengeance she panted to bring upon her victim's head. To this end, on the very evening that she retreated from the council-hall, she set forward to the borders; and, passing thence to the English camp (then pitched at Alnwick), was admitted to the castle where De Warenne lodged. She hoped that he might not be able to withstand her charms, and opened her mission with no less art than effect. De Warenne was made to believe, that on the strength of a passion Wallace had conceived for her, and which she treated with disdain, he had repented of his former refusal of the crown of Scotland; and misled by a hope that she would not repeat her rejection of his hand could it present her a sceptre, he was now attempting to compass that dignity by the most complicated intrigues. She then related how, at her instigation, the regent had deposed him from his military command; and she ended with saying, that impelled by loyalty to Edward (whom her better reason now recognised as the lawful sovereign of her

country) she had come to exhort that monarch to renew his invasion of the kingdom. Intoxicated with her beauty, De Warenne greedily drank in all her words, and ere he allowed this conference to break up, he had thrown himself at her feet, and implored her to grant him the privilege of presenting her to Edward as his intended bride. De Warenne was in the meridian of life, and being fraught with a power at court beyond most of his peers, she determined to accept his hand, and wield its influence to the destruction of Wallace, even should she be compelled to precipitate her country in his fall. De Warenne drew from her a half-reluctant consent, and while he poured forth the transports of a happy lover, he was not so much enamoured of the fine person of Lady Strathearn as to be altogether insensible to the advantages which his alliance with her would give to Edward in his Scottish pretensions. And as it would increase his own importance with that monarch, he lost no time in communicating the circumstance to him. Edward suspected something in this sudden attachment of the countess, which might cool the ardour of his officer for uniting so useful an agent to his cause; therefore, having highly approved De Warenne's conduct in the affair, to hasten the nuptials, he proposed being present at their solemnisation that very evening. The solemn vows which Lady Strathearn then pledged to De Warenne were pronounced by her with no holy awe of the marriage contract, but rather as those by which she swore to complete her revenge on Wallace. The day after she became De Warenne's wife she accompanied him by sea to Berwick, and from that place she despatched messengers to the regent, and to other nobles, fraught with promises which Edward had solemnly pledged himself to ratify. Her ambassador arrived at Stirling the day succeeding that in which Wallace and his troops had marched from Ballochgeich. The letters he brought were eagerly opened by Badenoch and his chieftains, and they found their contents to this effect:—She announced to them her marriage with the lord warden, who was returned into Scotland with every power for the final subjugation of the country, and therefore she besought the regent and his council not to raise a hostile arm against him if they would not merely escape the indignation of a great king, but ensure his favour. She cast out hints to Badenoch, as if Edward meant to reward his acquiescence with the crown of Scotland, and with similar baits, proportioned to the views

of all her other kinsmen, she smoothed their anger against that monarch's former insults, persuading them to at least remain inactive during the last struggle of their country.

Meanwhile, Wallace, taking his course along the banks of the Forth, encamped at the base of the craigs, east of Edinburgh Castle. The men were much fatigued, and hardly were laid upon their heather beds before they fell asleep. Wallace had learned from his scouts that the main body of the Southrons were within a few miles of Dalkeith. Thither he hoped to go next morning, and there strike the conclusive blow for Scotland by the destruction of the flower of the English army.

It was Wallace's custom, once at least in the night, to go himself the rounds of his posts, to see that all was safe. The air was serene, and he walked out on this duty. He passed from line to line, from station to station, and all was in order. One post alone remained to be visited, and that was a point of observation on the craigs near Arthur's seat. As he proceeded between the rocks which overhang the ascent of the mountain, he was startled by the sight of a figure seated on a cliff directly in the way he was to go. The moon, breaking from behind the clouds, shone full upon the spot, and discovered a majestic form in grey robes, leaning on a harp, while his face, mournfully gazing upward, was rendered venerable by a long white beard that mingled with the floating mist. Wallace paused, and stopping at some distance from this extraordinary apparition, looked on it in silence; then moving forward with a breathless caution, not to disturb the nocturnal bard, he gently approached. He was, however, descried. The venerable figure clasped his hands, and in a voice of mournful solemnity, exclaimed, "Art thou come, doomed of heaven, to hear the sad coronach?" Wallace started at this salutation. The bard, with the same emotion, continued: "No choral hymns hallow thy bleeding corse—wolves howl thy requiem—eagles scream over thy desolate grave! Fly, chieftain, fly!" "What!" cried Wallace, interrupting the awful pause, "thus addresses one whom he must mistake for some other warrior?" "Can the spirit of inspiration mistake its object?" demanded the bard. "Can he whose eyes have been opened be blind to Sir William Wallace—to the blood which clogs his mounting footsteps?" "And what or who am I to understand art thou?" replied Wallace. "Who I am?" resumed the bard, "will be shown to thee

when thou hast passed yon starry firmament. But the galaxy streams with blood ; the bugle of death is alone heard, and thy lacerated breast heaves in vain against the hoofs of opposing squadrons. They charge—Scotland falls ! Look not on me, champion of thy country ! Sold by thine enemies—betrayed by thy friends ! It was not the seer of St. Anson who gave thee these wounds—that heart's blood was not drawn by me ! a woman's hand in mail—ten thousand armed warriors—he sinks, he falls ! Red is the blood of Esk ! Thy vital stream hath dyed it. Fly, bravest of the brave, and live ! Stay, and perish !” Throwing his arms extended towards the heavens, while his grey beard mingled in the rising blast, the seer rushed from sight. Wallace saw the misty rocks alone, and was left in awful solitude.

For a few minutes he stood in profound silence. He had heard the destruction of Scotland declared, and himself sentenced to perish if he did not escape the general ruin by flying from her side ! This terrible decree of fate corroborated by the extremity of Bruce, and the divisions in the kingdom, had been sounded in his ear—had been pronounced by one of those sages of his country, on whom the spirit of prophecy yet descended, with all the horrors of a woe-denouncing trumpet. He did not doubt ; he believed the voice he had heard. But recovering from the first shock of such a doom, and remembering that it still left the choice to himself, between dishonoured life or glorious death, he resolved to show his respect to the oracle by manifesting a persevering obedience to the eternal voice which gave those agents utterance ; and while he bowed to the warning, he vowed to be the last who should fall from the side of his devoted country. “ If devoted,” cried he, “ then our fates shall be the same. My fall from thee shall be into thy grave. Scotland may have struck the breast that shielded her, yet, Father of Mercies, forgive her blindness, and grant me still permission a little longer to oppose my heart between her and this fearful doom ! ”

CHAPTER LXXI.

DALKEITH.

WALLACE drew up his army in order for the new battle near a convent of Cistercian monks, on the narrow plain of Dalkeith. The two rivers Esk, flowing on each side of the little phalanx,

formed a temporary barrier between it and the legions of De Warenne. The earl's troops seemed countless, while the Southron lords who led them, elated by the representations which the Countess of Strathearn had given to them of the disunited state of the Scottish army, and the consequent dismay which had seized their commander, bore down upon the Scots with an impetuosity which threatened their destruction. Deceived by his bride, De Warenne had entirely changed his former opinion of his opponent, and he placed himself on an adjoining height, intending from that commanding post to dispense his orders and behold his victory. "Soldiers!" cried he, "the rebel's hour is come. The sentence of heaven is gone forth against him. Charge resolutely, and he and his host are yours."

Fate did, indeed, hover over the opposing armies. She descended on the head of Wallace, and dictated from his plumes. She pointed his spear, she wielded his sword, she charged with him in the shock of battle. De Warenne saw his foremost thousands fall. He heard the shouts of the Scots, the cries of his men, and the plains of Stirling rose to his remembrance. He hastily ordered the knights around him to bear his wife from the field; and descending the hill was met and almost overwhelmed by his flying troops; horses without riders, men without shield or sword, but all in dismay, rushed past him. He called to them, he waved the royal standard, he urged, he reproached, he rallied, and led them back again. The fight recommenced. Long was the conflict. De Warenne fought for conquest, and to recover a lost reputation. Wallace contended for his country, and to show himself worthy of her latest blessing "before he should go hence, and be no more seen."

The issue declared for Scotland. But the ground was covered with the slain, and Wallace chased a wounded foe with troops which dropped as they pursued. Night compelled them to halt; and while they rested on their arms, Wallace was satisfied that he had destroyed the power of De Warenne. As he leaned on his sword, and stood with Edwin near the watch-fire, he contemplated the terrified Southrons, as they fled by the foot of the hill towards the Tweed. Wallace now told his friend of his adventure with the seer; and finding within himself how true religion excludes superstition, he added, "the proof of the Divine Spirit in prophecy is its completion. Hence let the false seer I met last night warn you, how you give credit to any prediction that might slacken

the sinews of duty. God can speak but one language. He is not a man that he should repent, neither a mortal that he should change his purpose. This prophet of Baal beguiled me into a credence of his denunciation, but not to adopt the conduct his alternative would have persuaded me to pursue. I now see that he was a traitor in both, and henceforth shall read my fate in the oracles of God alone. Obeying them, we need not fear the curses of our enemy, nor the lying of suborned soothsayers."

The splendour of this victory struck to the souls of the council at Stirling, but with no remorse. Scotland being again rescued from her foe, the disaffected lords affected to spurn at her preservation, declaring that they would rather bear the yoke of the veriest tyrant in the world than owe freedom to the man who (they pretended to believe) had conspired against their lives. And they had a reason for this decision: though De Warrenne was beaten, his wife was a victor. She had made Edward triumphant in the venal hearts of her kinsmen; gold, and promises of honours from the King of England, had sealed them his. All but the regent were ready to commit everything into the hands of Edward. The rising favour of these other lords with the court of England induced him to recollect that he might rule as the unrivalled friend of Bruce, should that prince live; or in the case of his death, he might have it in his own power to assume the Scottish throne. These thoughts made him fluctuate, and his country found him as undetermined in reason as unstable in fidelity.

Immediately on the victory at Dalkeith, Kirkpatrick (eager to be the first communicator of such welcome news to Lennox, who had planted himself as a watch at Stirling) withdrew secretly from Wallace's camp, and hoping to move the gratitude of the refractory lords, entered full of honest joy into the midst of their council.

He proclaimed the success of his commander. His answer was accusations and insult. All that had been charged against Wallace was re-urged with added acrimony. Treachery to the state, hypocrisy in morals, fanaticism in religion—no stigma was too extravagant to be affixed to his name. "So help me, God," cried Kirkpatrick, "I believe, that an honester man than William Wallace lives not in Scotland! And that ye know; and his virtues overtopping your littleness, ye would uproot the greatness which ye cannot equal." This speech, which a burst of indignation had wrested from him, brought

down the wrath of the whole party upon himself. Lord Athol, yet stung with his old wound, furiously struck him; Kirkpatrick drew his sword, and the two chieftains commenced a furious combat; many were hurt in attempting to separate them, and then the two were carried off insensible, and covered with wounds.

When this sad news was transmitted to Sir William Wallace, it found him on the banks of the Esk, just returned from the citadel of Berwick, where, once more master of that fortress, he had dictated the terms of a conqueror and a patriot.

In the scene of his former victories, the romantic shades of Hawthorndean, he now pitched his camp, and despatched the requisite orders to the garrisoned castles on the borders.

CHAPTER LXXII.

HAWTHORNDEAN.

NEXT morning, instead of coming as usual, directly to their acknowledged protector, the Lothian chieftains were seen at different parts of the camp, closely conversing in groups, and when any of Wallace's officers approached they separated or withdrew to a greater distance. This conduct Wallace attributed to its right source, and thought of Bruce with a sigh when he contemplated the variable substance of these men's minds. However, he was so convinced that nothing but the proclamation of Bruce, and that prince's personal exertions, could preserve his country from falling again into the snare from which he had just snatched it, that he was preparing to set out for Perthshire with such persuasions, when Ker entered his tent. He was followed by Lord Soulis, Lord Buchan, and several other chiefs of equally hostile intentions. Soulis did not hesitate to declare his errand.

"We come, Sir William Wallace, by command of the regent, and the assembled abthanes of Scotland, to take these brave troops, which have performed such good service to their country, from the power of a man who, we have every reason to believe, means to turn their arms against the liberties of the realm. Without a pardon from the states—without the signature of the regent—in contempt of the court which, having found you guilty of treason, had in mercy delayed to pronounce sentence on your crime, you have presumed to place yourself at the head of the national troops, and to take to

yourself the merit of a victory won by their prowess alone ! Your designs are known, and the authority you have despised is now roused to punish. You are to accompany us this day to Stirling. We have brought a guard of four thousand men to compel your obedience."

Before the indignant Wallace could utter the answer his wrongs dictated, Bothwell, who, at sight of the regent's troops, had hastened to his general's tent, entered, followed by his chieftains : " Were your guard forty thousand instead of four," cried he, " they should not force our commander from us—they should not extinguish the glory of Scotland beneath the traitorous devices of hell-engendered envy and murderous cowardice ! " Soulis turned on him with eyes of fire, and laid his hand on his sword. " Ay, cowardice ! " reiterated Bothwell ; " the midnight ravisher, the slanderer of virtue, the betrayer of his country, knows in his heart that he fears to draw aught but the assassin's steel. He dreads the sceptre of honour : Wallace must fall that vice may reign in Scotland. A thousand brave Scots lie under these sods, and a thousand yet survive who may share their graves ; but they never will relinquish their invincible leader into the hands of traitors ! " The clamours of the citadel of Stirling now resounded through the tent. Invectives, accusations, threatenings, reproaches, and revilings, joined in one turbulent uproar. Again swords were drawn, and Wallace, in attempting to beat down the weapons of Soulis and Buchan, aimed at Bothwell's heart, must have received the point of Soulis's in his own body, had he not grasped the blade, and, wrenching it out of the chief's hand, broke it into shivers : " Such be the fate of every sword which Scot draws against Scot ! " cried he. " Put up your weapons, my friends. The arm of Wallace is not shrunk that he could not defend himself, did he think that violence were necessary. Hear my determination once and for ever ! I acknowledge no authority in Scotland but the laws. The present regent and his abthanes outrage them in every ordinance, and I should indeed be a traitor to my country did I submit to such men's behests. I shall not obey their summons to Stirling, neither will I permit a hostile arm to be raised in this camp against their delegates, unless the violence begins with them. This is my answer." Uttering these words, he motioned Bothwell to follow him, and left the tent.

Crossing a rude plank bridge, which then lay over the Esk,

he met Lord Ruthven, accompanied by Edwin and Lord Sinclair. The latter came to inform Wallace that ambassadors from Edward awaited his presence at Roslyn. "They come to offer peace," cried Sinclair. "Then," answered Wallace, "I shall not delay going where I may hear the terms." Horses were brought, and during the short ride Wallace communicated to his indignant friends the particulars of the scene he had left. "These contentions must be terminated," added he, "and, with God's blessing, a few days and they shall be so!" "Heaven grant it!" returned Sinclair, thinking he referred to the proposed negotiation. "If Edward's offers be at all reasonable, I would urge you to accept them, otherwise invasion from without, and civil commotion within, will probably make a desert of poor Scotland." Ruthven interrupted him:—"Despair not, my lord! Whatever be the fate of this embassy, let us remember that it is our steadiest friend who decides, and that his arm is still with us to repel invasion, to chastise treason!"

Being arrived at the gate of Roslyn, Wallace, regardless of those ceremonials which often delay the business they pretend to dignify, entered at once into the hall where the ambassadors sat. Baron Hilton was one, and Le de Spencer (father to the young and violent envoy of that name) was the other. At sight of the Scottish chief they rose, and the good baron, believing he came on a propitious errand, smiling, said, "Sir William Wallace, it is your private ear I am commanded to seek." While speaking he looked on Sinclair and the other lords. "These chiefs are as myself," replied Wallace; "but I will not impede your embassy by crossing the wishes of your master in a trifle." He then turned to his friends: "Indulge the monarch of England in making me the first acquainted with that which can only be a message to the whole nation."

The chiefs withdrew; and Hilton, without further parley, opened his mission. He said that King Edward, more than ever impressed with the wondrous military talents of Sir William Wallace, and solicitous to make a friend of so heroic an enemy, had sent him an offer of grace, which, if he contemned, must be the last. He offered him a theatre whereon he might display his peerless endowments to the admiration of the world,—the kingdom of Ireland, with its yet unreaped fields of glory, and all the ample riches of its abundant provinces. Edward only required, in return for this royal gift, that he should abandon the cause of Scotland, swear fealty

to him for Ireland, and resign into his hands one whom he had proscribed as the most ungrateful of traitors. In double acknowledgment for the latter sacrifice, Wallace need only send to England a list of those Scottish lords against whom he bore resentment, and their fates should be ordered according to his dictates. Edward concluded his offers by inviting him immediately to London to be invested with his new sovereignty.

Wallace replied calmly, and without hesitation: "To this message an honest man can make but one reply. Edward knows that as a knight, a true Scot, and a man, I should dishonour myself to accept even life, ay, or the lives of all my kindred, upon these terms."

Baron Hilton turned sorrowfully away, and Le de Spencer rose: "Sir William Wallace, my part of the embassy must be delivered to you in the assembly of your chieftains!" "In the congregation of my camp," returned he; and opening the door of the anteroom in which his friends stood, he sent Edwin to summon his chiefs before the council-tent.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

WALLACE'S TENT.

WHEN Wallace approached he found not only the captains of his own army, but the followers of Soulis and the chieftains of Lothian. He looked on his enemies with a fearless eye, and passing through the crowd, took his station beside the ambassadors on the platform of the tent. The venerable Hilton turned away with tears on his cheeks as the chief advanced, and Le de Spencer came forward to speak. Wallace, with a dignified action, requested his leave for a few minutes, and then addressing the warriors, unfolded to them the offer of Edward to him, and his reply. "And now," added he, "the ambassador of England is at liberty to declare his master's alternative."

Le de Spencer again advanced; but the acclamation with which the followers of Wallace acknowledged the nobleness of his answer excited such an opposite clamour on the side of the Soulis party, that Le de Spencer was obliged to vociferate long and loudly for silence before he could be heard. But the first words which caught the ears of his audience acted like a spell, and seemed to hold them in breathless attention.

"Since Sir William Wallace rejects the grace of his liege lord,

Edward, King of England, offered to him this once, and never to be again repeated : thus saith the king in his clemency to the earls, barons, knights, and commonalty of Scotland ! To every one of them, chief and vassal, excepting the aforesaid incorrigible rebel, he, the royal Edward, grants an amnesty of all their past treasons against his sacred person and rule, provided that within twenty-four hours after they hear the words of this proclamation, they acknowledge their disloyalty with repentance, and laying down their arms, swear eternal fealty to their only lawful ruler, Edward, the lord of the whole island from sea to sea." Le de Spencer then proclaimed the King of England to be now on the borders with an army of one hundred thousand men, ready to march into the heart of the kingdom, and put to the rack all of every sex, age, and condition, who should venture to dispute his rights. "Yield," added he, "while you may not only grasp the mercy extended to you, but the rewards and the honours he is ready to bestow. Adhere to that unhappy man, and by to-morrow's sunset your offended king will be on these hills, and then mercy shall be no more ! Death is the doom of Sir William Wallace, and a similar fate to every Scot who after this hour dares to give him food, shelter or succour. He is the prisoner of King Edward, and thus I demand him at your hands !"

Wallace spoke not, but with an unmoved countenance looked around upon the assembly. Bothwell's full soul forced utterance from his labouring breast : "Tell your sovereign," cried he, "that he mistakes. We are the conquerors who ought to dictate terms of peace ! Wallace is our invincible leader, the earthly hope in whom we trust, and it is not in the power of men nor devils to bribe us to betray our benefactor. Away to your king and tell him that Andrew Murray and every honest Scot is ready to live or to die by the side of Sir William Wallace." "And by this good sword I swear the same !" cried Ruthven. "And so do I !" rejoined Scrymgeour ; "or may the standard of Scotland be my winding-sheet !" "Or may the Clyde swallow us up quick !" exclaimed Lockhart of Lee, shaking his mailed hand at the ambassadors.

But not another chief spoke for Wallace. Even Sinclair was intimidated. But most, oh ! shame to Scotland and to man, cast up their bonnets and cried aloud—"Long live King Edward, the only legitimate lord of Scotland !" At this outcry, which was echoed even by some in whom he had

confided, Wallace threw out his arms, as if he would yet protect Scotland from herself :—" O ! desolate people," exclaimed he, in a voice of piercing woe, " too credulous of fair speeches, and not aware of the calamities which are coming upon you ! Call to remembrance the miseries you have suffered, and start, before it be too late, from this last snare of your oppressor !— Have I yet to tell ye that his embrace is death ? O ! look yet to heaven, and ye shall find a rescue ! " Bruce seemed to rise at that moment in pale but gallant apparition before his soul.*

" Seize that rebellious man," cried Soulis to his marshals. " In the name of the King of England I command you." " And in the name of the King of kings I denounce death on him who attempts it," exclaimed Bothwell, throwing himself between Wallace and the men ; " put forth a hostile hand towards him, and this bugle shall call a thousand swords to lay this platform in blood ! "

Soulis, followed by his knights, pressed forward to execute his treason himself. Scrymgeour, Ruthven, Lockhart, and Ker, rushed before their friend. Edwin starting forward, drew his sword, and the clash of steel was heard. Bothwell and Soulis grappled together, the falchion of Ruthven gleamed amidst a hundred swords and blood flowed around. Wallace, in vain, sought to enforce peace ; he was not heard, he was not felt in the dreadful warfare : Ker fell with a gasp at his feet, and breathed no more. At such a sight Wallace wrung his hands, and exclaimed in bitter anguish, " Oh, my country ! was it for these horrors that I became a homeless wretch, and passed my days and nights in fields of carnage ! Venerable Mar, dear and valiant Graham ! is this the consummation for which you fell ? " At that moment, Bothwell having disabled Soulis, would have blown his bugle to call up his men to a general conflict, but Wallace snatched the horn from his hand ; he drew his sword, and stretching the mighty arm that held it over the throng, with more than mortal energy he exclaimed, " Peace ! men of Scotland, and for the last time hear the voice of William Wallace." A dead silence immediately ensued, and he proceeded, " If ye have aught of nobleness within ye, if a delusion more fell than witchcraft have not blinded your sense, look beyond this field of horror, and behold your country free. Edward, in these apparent demands, sues for peace. Did we not drive his armies into the

* This speech is almost verbatim from one of our old historians.

sea ? And were we resolved, he never could cross our borders more. What is it then you do, when you again put your necks under his yoke ? Did he not seek to bribe me to betray you ?—and yet, when I refuse to purchase life and the world's rewards by such baseness, you—you forget that you are free-born Scots, that you are victors, and he the vanquished ; and you give, not sell, your birthright to the demands of a tyrant. I draw this sword for you no more. But there yet lives a prince, a descendant of the royal heroes of Scotland, whom Providence may conduct to be your preserver. Reject the proposals of Edward, dare to defend the freedom you now possess, and that prince will soon appear to crown your patriotism with glory and happiness ! ”

“ We acknowledge no prince, but King Edward of England ! ” cried Buchan. The exclamation was reiterated by a most disgraceful majority on the ground. Wallace was transfixed. “ Then,” cried Le de Spencer in the first pause of the tumult, “ to every man, woman, and child throughout the realm of Scotland, excepting Sir William Wallace, I proclaim, in the name of King Edward, pardon and peace.”

At these words several hundred Scottish chieftains dropped on their knees before Le de Spencer, and murmured their vows of fealty. Indignant, grieved, Wallace took his helmet from his head, and throwing his sword into the hand of Bothwell, “ That weapon,” cried he, “ which I wrested from this very King Edward, and with which I twice drove him from our borders, I give to you. In your hands it may again serve Scotland. I relinquish a soldier's name, on the spot where I humbled England three times in one day, where I now see my victorious country deliver herself bound into the grasp of the vanquished. I go without sword or buckler from this dishonoured field, and what Scot will dare to strike the unguarded head of William Wallace ? ” As he spoke he threw his shield and helmet to the ground, and took his course, with a fearless and dignified step, through the parting ranks of his enemies, who, awe-struck, or kept in check by a suspicion that others might not second the attack they would have made on him, durst not lift an arm or breathe a word as he passed.

Edwin and Bothwell immediately followed him, but Lockhart and Scrymgeour remained to take charge of the remains of the faithful Ker, and to observe the tendency of the tumult, which began to murmur amongst the lower orders of the bystanders.

CHAPTER LXIV.

BANKS OF THE ESK.

A VAGUE suspicion of the regent and his thanes, and yet a pusillanimity, which shrunk from supporting that Wallace whom those thanes chose to abandon, carried the spirit of slavery from the council-tent, to the ranks of Ruthven, and even to the perversion of some few who had followed Bothwell. The brave troops of Lanark (which the desperate battle of Dalkeith had reduced to not more than sixty men) alone remained unmoved.

In the moment when the indignant Ruthven saw his legions rolling off towards Le de Spencer, Scrymgeour placed himself at the head of the men of Lanark. Unfurling the banner of Scotland, he marched to the tent of Bothwell, whither he did not doubt that Wallace had retired. He found him assuaging the impassioned grief of Edwin, and striving to moderate the vehement wrath of Murray. "Leave these worthless men," said he, "to the fate they have incurred by the innocent blood shed this day! The few brave hearts who yet remain loyal to their country are insufficient to stem at this spot the torrent of corruption. Retire beyond the Forth. Rally all true Scots around Huntingtower. Let the royal inmate proclaim himself, and, at the foot of the Grampians, lock the gates of the Highlands upon our enemies. From those bulwarks he will issue in strength, and Scotland may again be free!"

"Free, but never more honoured!" cried Edwin; "never more beloved by me! Ungrateful, treacherous land," added he, starting on his feet, and raising his hands: "Oh, that the sea would engulf thee—that thy name and thy ingratitude could be no more remembered! I will never wear a sword for her again." "Edwin!" ejaculated Wallace, in a reproachful tone. "Exhort me not to forgive my country!" returned he; "tell me, to pardon the assassin who strikes his steel into my heart, and I will obey you; but to pardon Scotland for the injury she has done to you I never, never can. Think not, noblest of masters, dearest of friends, that I will shine in the light of those envious stars which have displaced the sun! No, *tibi solo* shall henceforth be the impresse on my shield, and till your beams restore your country, the springing laurel of Edwin Ruthven shall wither where they grew!"

A tear stood in Wallace's eyes, while he said in a low voice,

‘ If thou art mine, thou art Scotland’s. Me she rejects. Mysterious heaven wills that I should quit my post ; but for thee, Edwin, as a relic of the fond love I yet bear this wretched country, abide by her, defend her for my sake ; and, if Bruce lives, he will be to thee a second Wallace ! ’ Edwin listened and sobbed, but his heart was fixed ; unable to speak, he broke from his friend’s arms, and hurried into an interior apartment to subdue his emotions by pouring them forth to God.

Ruthven joined in opinion with Bothwell, that if ever a civil war could be sanctified this was the time ; and in spite of all that Wallace could urge they remained firm in their resolution. Bruce they hardly dared hope could recover ; and to relinquish the guiding hand of their best leader at this crisis was a sacrifice no earthly power should compel them to make. “ So far from it,” cried Lord Bothwell, dropping on his knees, and grasping the cross hilt of his sword in both hands, “ I swear by the blood of the crucified Lord of this ungrateful world, that should Bruce die, I will obey no other king of Scotland than William Wallace ! ” Wallace turned ashy pale as he listened to this vow. At that moment Scrymgeour entered, followed by the Lanark veterans, and all repeated the oath of Bothwell ; then starting up, called on the chief to lead them forth and avenge them of his enemies.

Wallace stretched his hands over them, and said, in a subdued and faltering voice, “ God will avenge our murdered friend ; my sword is sheathed for ever. May that Holy Being, who is the true King of the virtuous, always be present with you ! I feel your love, and I appreciate it. But Bothwell, Ruthven, Lockhart, Scrymgeour, my faithful Lanark followers, leave me awhile. Let me pass this night alone, and to-morrow you shall know the resolution of your grateful Wallace ! ”

“ And am I, too, to leave you ? ” said Edwin. “ Yes,” replied Wallace ; “ I have much to do with my own thoughts this night. I must have solitude to arrange my plans. To-morrow you shall know them. Meanwhile, farewell ! ” As he spoke, he pressed the youth to his breast, and, grasping the hands of his three other friends, bade them an earnest adieu.

Bothwell lingered a moment at the tent door. “ Let your first plan be, that to-morrow you lead us to Lord Soulis’s quarters, to teach the traitor what it is to be a Scot and a man ! ” “ My plans shall be deserving of my colleagues,” replied Wallace ; “ and whether they be executed on this

or the other side of the Forth, you shall find, Bothwell, that Scotland's peace and the honour of her best sons are the dearest considerations of your friend."

When Wallace was left alone, he stood for awhile, listening to the departing steps of his friends. When the last sound died on his ear, "I shall hear them no more!" cried he; and throwing himself into a seat, he remained for an hour in a trance of grievous thought. Melancholy remembrances and prospects dire for Scotland pressed upon his heart. "It is to God alone I confide my country!" cried he; "His mercy will pity its madness, and forgive its deep transgressions. My duty is to remove the object of ruin far from the power of any longer exciting jealousy or awakening zeal." With these words he took a pen in his hand to write to Bruce.

He briefly narrated the events which compelled him, if he would avoid civil war, to quit his country for ever. The general hostility of the nobles, the acquiescence of the people, in measures which menaced his life and sacrificed the freedom for which he had so long fought, convinced him that his commission was now closed. He was summoned by heaven to exchange the field for the cloister; and to the monastery at Chartres he was now hastening to dedicate the remainder of his days to the peace of a future world. He exhorted Bruce to confide in the Lords Ruthven and Bothwell, for he would find them true unto death. He counselled him, as the leading measure, to circumvent the treason of Scotland's enemies, to go immediately to Kilchurn Castle, where he knew resources would be. To use Loch-awe and his brave vassals for his establishment on the throne, Wallace advised Bruce. And so, amidst the natural fortresses of the Highlands, he might recover his health, collect his friends, and openly proclaim himself. "Then," added he, "when Scotland is your own, let its bulwarks be its mountains and its people's arms. Raze to the ground the castles of those base chiefs who have only embattled them to betray and enslave their country." He earnestly conjured his prince that he would wear Kirkpatrick as a buckler on his heart; that he would place Scrymgeour with his Lanark veterans, and the faithful Grimsby next him as his bodyguard; and that he would love and cherish the brave and tender Edwin for his sake. "When my prince and friend receives this," added he, "Wallace shall have bidden an eternal farewell to Scotland, but his heart will be amidst its hills.

My king, and his friends most dear to me, will still be there ! The earthly part of my beloved wife rests within its bosom ! But I go to rejoin her soul—to meet it in vigils consecrated wholly to the blessed Being in whose presence she rejoices for ever.

“ Should Helen—my heart’s sister—be near you when you read this, tell her that Wallace presses her cheek with a brother’s farewell, and from his inmost soul he blesses her.”

Messages of respectful adieus he sent to Isabella, Lady Ruthven, and the sage of Ercildown, and then kneeling down, he wrote his last invocations for the prosperity and happiness of Bruce.

This letter finished, with a more tranquil mind he addressed Lord Ruthven ; detailing to him his reasons for leaving such faithful friends so clandestinely ; and after mentioning his purpose of proceeding to France, he ended with those expressions of gratitude which the worthy chief so well deserved ; and exhorting him to transfer his zeal for him to the royal Bruce, closed the letter with begging him, for the sake of his friend, his king, and his country, to return immediately with all his followers to Huntingtower, and there to rally round their prince. His letter to Scrymgeour spoke nearly the same language. But when he began to write to Bothwell, to bid him that farewell which his heart foreboded would be for ever in this world, he lost some of his composure, and his handwriting testified the emotion of his mind. How, then, was he shaken when he addressed the devoted Edwin, the brother of his soul ! He dropped the pen from his hand. At that moment he felt all he was going to relinquish, and he exclaimed, “ Oh, Scotland ! my ungrateful country, what is it you do ? Is it thus that you repay your most faithful servants ? Is it not enough that the wife of my bosom, the companion of my youth, should be torn from me by your enemies, but your hand must wrest from my bereaved heart its every other solace ? You snatch from me my friends, you would deprive me of my life. To preserve you from that crime, I embitter the cup of death ; I go far from the tombs of my fathers—from the grave of my Marion, where I had fondly hoped to rest ! ” His head sank on his arm ; his heart gave way and poured from his eyes. “ Dreary, dreary solitude ! ” cried he, looking round him with perception of all that he had lost : “ how have I been mocked these three long years ! What is renown ? what the acclaim of admiring throngs ? what worshipping gratefulness but breath and vapour. It seems to shelter the mountain’s top ;

the blast comes ; it rolls from its sides ; and the lonely hill is left to the storm ! So stand I, my Marion, bereft of thee. In weal or woe, thy smiles were mine ; my head reclined on that faithful breast, and still I found my heaven. But now, desolate and alone, ruin is around me. Destruction waits on all who would steal one pang from the heart of William Wallace !—even pity is no more for me. Take me, then, O ! Power of Mercy !” cried he, stretching forth his hands, “ take me to Thyself !”

At these words a peal of thunder burst on his ear, and seemed to roll over his tent, till it died away in long and solemn reverberation. Wallace rose from his knee. “Thou callest me, my Father !” cried he. “I go from the world to Thee ! I come, and before Thy altars shall know no human weakness.”

In a paroxysm of sacred enthusiasm he rushed from the tent, and, reckless whither he went, struck into the depths of Roslyn woods. He pierced their remotest thickets. He reached their boundary—it was traversed by a rapid stream, but that did not stop his course ; he sprang over it, and ascending its bank, was startled by the sound of his name. Grimsby, attended by a youth, stood before him. The veteran expressed amazement at meeting his master alone at this hour, unhelmeted and unarmed, and in so dangerous a direction. “The road,” said he, “between this and Stirling is beset with your enemies.” Instead of noticing this information, Wallace inquired what news he brought from Huntingtower. “The worst,” said he. “By this time Bruce is no more !” Wallace gasped, and fell against a tree.

Grimsby informed him that Bruce being so far recovered as to have left his chamber for the family apartment, while he was sitting with the ladies, a letter was brought to Lady Helen. She opened it, read a few lines, and fell senseless into the arms of her sister. Bruce snatched up the packet, but not a word did he speak till he had perused it to the end. It was from the Countess of Strathearn, written in the triumph of revenge, exulting in what she termed the demonstration of Wallace’s guilt, congratulating herself on having been the primary means of discovering it, and boasting that his once adoring Scotland now held him in such detestation as to have doomed him to die. “No power on earth can save him now,” continued she ; “your heart must yield him, Helen, to another rest than your bridal chamber. His iron breast has met with others as adamantine as his own ; and like a rock he falls—

undeplored by all but you, lost, self-deluded girl! My noble lord, the princely De Warrenne, informs me that William Wallace would be burnt as a double traitor in England, and a price is now set upon his head in Scotland! hence, there is safety for him no more. None will dare support the man whom friends and enemies abandon to destruction!"

"Yes," cried Bruce, starting from his seat, "I will support him, thou damned traitress! Bruce will declare himself! Bruce will throw himself before his friend, and in his breast receive every arrow meant for that godlike heart! Yes," cried he, glancing on the terrified Isabella, who believed that his delirium was returned, "I would snatch him in those arms, from their murderous flames, did all the fiends of hell guard their infernal fire!" Not a word more did he utter, but darting from the apartment, was soon seen before the barbican-gate, armed from head to foot. Grimsby stood there, to whom he called to bring a horse, "For that the *Light of Scotland* was in danger." Grimsby, who understood by that term his beloved master was in peril, instantly obeyed; and Bruce, as instantly mounting, struck his rowels into the horse, and was out of sight ere Grimsby could reach his stirrup to follow.

But that faithful soldier speeded after him, and came in view of Bruce just as he was leaping a chasm in the mountain path. The horse struck his heel against a loose stone, and fell headlong into the ravine. Grimsby rushed towards the spot, and saw the animal struggling in the agonies of death at the bottom. Bruce lay insensible amongst some bushes which grew nearer the top. With difficulty the honest Englishman got him to the surface of the hill, and finding all attempts to recover him ineffectual, laid him on his own beast, and so carried him slowly back to the castle. The assiduities of the sage of Ercildown restored him to life, but not to recollection. "The fever returned on him with a delirium so hopeless of recovery," said Grimsby, "that Lady Helen has sent me with this youth to implore you to come to Huntingtower, and there embattle yourself against your own and your prince's enemies."

"Send me," cried Walter Hay, grasping Wallace's hand, "send me back to Lady Helen, and let me tell her that our benefactor will not abandon us! Should you depart, Scotland's genius will go with you! again she will be in ruins. De Valence will regain possession of my dear lady, and you will not be near to save her."

“Grimsby, Walter, my friends!” cried Wallace in an agitated voice; “I do not abandon Scotland—she drives me from her. Would she have allowed me, I would have borne her in my arms until my latest gasp; but it must not be so. I resign her into the Almighty hands, to which I commit myself—they will also preserve the Lady Helen from violence. I cannot forego my trust, for the Bruce also! If he live he will protect her for my sake, and should he die, Bothwell and Ruthven will cherish her for their own.” “But you will return with us to Huntingtower,” cried Grimsby. “Disguised in these peasants’ garments, which we have brought for the purpose, you may pass through the legions of the regent with perfect security.” “Let me implore you, if not for your own sake, for ours! Save yourself for them who can know no safety when you are gone!” Walter clung to his arm while uttering this supplication. Wallace looked tenderly upon him:—“I would save myself, and I will, please God,” said he, “but by no means unworthy of myself. I go, but not under any disguise. Openly have I defended Scotland, and openly will I pass through her lands. No Scot dare lift a hand against this anointed head.” The soul of Wallace swelled high, but devoutly, while uttering this.

“Whither you go,” cried Grimsby, “let me follow you.” “And me, too!” rejoined Walter, “and when you look on us, think not that Scotland is altogether ungrateful!”

“My faithful friends,” returned he, “whither I go, I must go alone. And as a proof of your love, grant me your obedience this once. At sunrise repair to our camp, there you will know my destination. But till Bruce proclaims himself at the head of his country’s armies, for my sake never reveal to mortal man, that he who lies debilitated by sickness at Huntingtower is other than Sir Thomas de Longueville.” “We will obey our master,” replied Grimsby. “You command me to adhere to Bruce, to serve him till the hour of his death! I will—but should he die, then I may seek you, and be again your faithful servant?” “You will find me before the cross of Christ,” returned Wallace, “with saints my fellow-soldiers, and God my only King! Till then, Grimsby, farewell! Walter, carry my fidelity to your mistress. She will share my thoughts with the Blessed Virgin of Heaven, for in all my prayers shall her name be remembered.”

Grimsby sank on the earth, and gave way to a burst of manly

sorrow. Walter hid his weeping face in the folds of his master's mantle, which had fallen from his shoulders to the ground. Lost in grief, no thought seemed to exist in the young man's heart but the resolution to live only for his persecuted benefactor ; he looked up to seek the face of Wallace—but Wallace had disappeared ; and all that remained to the breaking hearts of his faithful servants was the tartan plaid which they had clasped in their arms.

CHAPTER LXXV.

LUMLOCH.

WALLACE struck into the deep defiles of the Pentland Hills. They pointed to different tracks. Aware that some of his friends might dare the perils attendant on his fellowship, he hesitated a moment which path to take. Certainly not towards Huntingtower, to bring destruction on its royal inhabitant. Nor to any chieftain of the Highlands, to give rise to civil warfare. Neither would he pursue the eastern track, for in that direction, as pointing to France, his friends would most likely seek him. He therefore turned towards Ayr. The road was circuitous, but it would soon enough take him from the land of his fathers—from the country he must never see again !

"Shall I visit thee again ?" said he, as he hurried along the craigs ; "Elderslie ! Elderslie, 'tis no triumphant warrior that approaches. Receive—shelter thy deserted, widowed master ! I come, my Marion, to mourn thee in thine own domains !" He ascended the cliffs ; he rushed down the hazel-crowned pathway—thistles and thickly-interwoven underwood obstructed his steps. Breaking through them all, he turned the angle of the rock—the last screen between him and the view of his once-beloved home. On this spot he used to stand on moonlight evenings, watching the graceful form of his Marion as she passed to and fro within her chamber. His eyes now turned instinctively to the point, but it gazed on vacancy. His home had disappeared ; one solitary tower alone remained to mourn over the desolation of all by which it had once been surrounded. Not a human being now moved on the spot which, three years before, was thronged with his grateful vassals. Not a voice was now heard, where then sounded the harp of Halbert—where breathed the song of his beloved Marion ! "Death !" cried he, "how many ways

hast thou to bereave poor mortality ! All, all gone ! My Marion sleeps in Bothwell : the faithful Halbert at her feet. And my peasantry of Lanark, how many of you have found untimely graves in the bosom of your vainly rescued country ! ”

A few steps forward, and he stood on a mound of mouldering fragments, heaped over the pavement of what had been the hall. “ My wife’s blood marks the stones beneath ! ” cried he. He flung himself on the ruins, and a groan burst from his heart. “ Solitude ! naught is here, but Wallace and his sorrow. Marion ! I call, and even thou dost not answer me ; thou, who didst ever fly at the sound of my voice ! Look on me, love ! ” exclaimed he, stretching his arms towards the sky ; “ look on me, and for once, for ever, cheer thy lonely, heart-stricken Wallace ! ” Tears choked his further utterance ; and once more laying his head upon the stones, he wept in silence, till exhausted nature found repose in sleep.

The sun was gilding the summits of the ruined tower under whose shadow he lay, when Wallace opened his eyes ; looking around him, he smote his breast, and with a heavy groan sunk back upon the stones. In the silence he thought he heard a rustling near him, and a half-suppressed sigh. He listened breathless. The sigh was repeated. He gently raised himself on his hand, and turned towards the spot whence the sound proceeded. The branches of a rose-tree that had been planted by his Marion shook and scattered the leaves of its ungathered flowers upon the brambles which grew beneath. Wallace rose in agitation. A human figure appeared, retreating behind the ruins. He advanced towards it, and beheld Edwin Ruthven. The moment their eyes met, Edwin precipitated himself at his feet, and clinging to him, exclaimed, “ Pardon me this pursuit ! But we meet to part no more ! ” Wallace raised him, and strained him to his breast in silence. Edwin, in hardly articulate accents, continued, “ Some kind power checked your hand when writing to your Edwin. You could not command him not to follow you ! you left the letter unfinished, and thus I come to bless you for not condemning me to die of a broken heart ! ” “ I did not write farewell to thee,” cried Wallace, looking mournfully on him, “ but I meant it, for I must part from all I love in Scotland. It is my doom. This country needs me not, and I have need of heaven, I go into its outcourts at Chartres. Follow me there, dear boy, when thou hast accomplished thy noble career on earth, and

then our grey hairs shall mingle together over the altar of the God of Peace; but now receive the farewell of thy friend. Return to Bruce, and be to him the representative of William Wallace." "Never!" cried Edwin; "thou alone art my prince, my friend, my brother, my all in this world! My parents, dear as they are, would have buried my youth in a cloister, but your name called me to honour; and to you, in life or in death, I dedicate my being." "Then," returned Wallace, "that honour summons you to the side of the dying Bruce. He is now in the midst of his foes." "And where art thou?" interrupted Edwin; "who drove thee hence, but enemies? who line these roads, but wretches sent to betray their benefactor? No, my friend, thy fate shall be my fate—thy woe my woe! We live, or we die together; the field, the cloister, or the tomb—all shall be welcomed by Edwin Ruthven, if they separate him not from thee!" Seeing that Wallace was going to speak, and fearful that it was to repeat his commands to be left alone, he suddenly exclaimed with vehemence, "Father of men and angels! grant me Thy favour only as I am true to the vow I have sworn, never more to leave the side of Sir William Wallace."

Wallace read an invincible determination in the eye and gesture of Edwin; and, yielding to the demands of friendship, he threw himself on his neck. "For thy sake, Edwin, I will yet endure awhile mankind at large! We will go together to France, and while I seek a probationary quiet in some of its remote cities, thou mayest bear the standard of Scotland in the land of our ally against the enemies of Bruce." "Make of me what you will," returned Edwin, "only do not divide me from yourself!"

Their course was then taken along the Cartlane Craigs. Though Wallace had spread the lately barren hills with harvests, yet had an ear of corn been asked in his name it would have been denied. A price was set upon his head, and the lives of all who should succour him would be forfeited! He who had given bread and homes to thousands was left to perish—had not where to shelter his head. Edwin looked anxiously on him as at times they sped silently along: "Ah!" thought he, "this heroic endurance of evil is the true cross of our celestial Captain! Let who will carry its painted insignia to the Holy Land, here is the man who bears the real substance, that walks undismayed in the path of his sacrificed Lord!"

A common Highland bonnet, which Edwin had purchased

at one of the cottages to which he had gone alone to buy a few oaten cakes, hung over the face of his friend. That face was pale and sad ; but whenever it turned on Edwin, a bright smile spoke the peaceful consciousness within, a look of grateful affection expressed comfort at being, in defiance of every danger, not yet wholly forsaken. Edwin rejoiced in every glad beam which shone on the face of him he loved. To be occasionally near Wallace, to share his confidence with others, had always filled him with joy, but now to be the only one on whom he leaned for consolation, was bliss unutterable. He even chid his beating heart for a delight which seemed to exult when his friend suffered :—" But not so," ejaculated he internally ; " to be with thee is the delight !—in life or in death thy presence is the sunshine of my soul ! "

When they arrived within sight of Bothwell Castle, Wallace stopped. " We must not go thither," said Edwin, replying to the sentiment which spoke from the eyes of his friend ; " the servants of my cousin Andrew may not be as faithful as their lord ! " " I will not try them," returned Wallace, with a resigned smile ; " my presence in Bothwell Chapel shall not pluck danger on the head of my dauntless Murray. She wakes in heaven for me whose body sleeps there ; and knowing where to find the jewel, my friend, shall I linger over the vacated casket ? "

While he yet spoke, a chieftain on horseback suddenly emerged from the trees which led to the castle, and drew to their side. Edwin was wrapped in his plaid, and, concealing his face that no chance of his recognition might betray his companion, he walked briskly on, without once looking at the stranger. But Wallace, being without any shade over a form which for majesty and grace was unequalled in Scotland, could not be mistaken. He, too, moved swiftly forward. The horseman spurred after him. Perceiving himself pursued, and therefore known, and aware that he must be overtaken, he suddenly stopped. Edwin drew his sword, and would have given it into the hand of his friend, but Wallace put it back. " I would not use steel against my countrymen, but none shall take me while I have a sinew to resist. "

The chieftain now checked his horse in front of Wallace, and respectfully raising his visor, discovered Sir John Monteith. At sight of him, Edwin dropped the point of his sword, and Wallace, stepping back, " Monteith," said he, " I am sorry for this rencontre. If you would be safe from the destiny which

pursues me, you must retire immediately, and forget that we have met." "Never," cried Monteith; "I know the ingratitude of an envious country drives the bravest of her champions from our borders, but I also know what belongs to myself! To serve you at all hazards! And by conjuring you to become my guest, in my Castle on the Frith of Clyde, I would demonstrate my grateful sense of the dangers you once incurred for me, and I therefore thank fortune for this rencontre."

In vain Wallace expressed his determination not to bring peril on any of his countrymen by sojourning under any roof till he were far from Scotland. In vain he urged to Monteith the outlawry which should await him should the abthanes discover that he had given shelter to the man whom they had chosen to denounce. Monteith, after equally unsuccessful persuasion on his side, at last said, that he knew a vessel was now lying at Newark, near his castle, in which Wallace might immediately embark; and he implored him, by past friendship, to allow him to be his guide to its anchorage. To enforce this supplication, he threw himself off his horse, and, with protestations of fidelity entreated not to be refused the last comfort he should ever know in his now degraded country. "Once I saw Scotland's steady champion, the brave Douglas, rifled from her shores! Do not doom me to a second grief, bitterer than the first; do not yourself drive me from the side of her last hero! Ah! let me behold you, companion of my school-days, friend, leader, benefactor! till the sea wrests you for ever from my eyes!" Exhausted and affected, Wallace gave his hand to Monteith; the tear of gratitude stood in his eye. He looked affectionately from Monteith to Edwin, from Edwin to Monteith: "Wallace shall yet live in the memory of the trusty of this land! you, my friend, prove it. I go richly forth, for the hearts of good men are my companions."

Night overtook the travellers near the village of Lumloch. Here a storm coming on, Monteith advised his friends to take shelter and rest. "You may sleep secure in an old barn which at present has no ostensible owner," said he. "I remarked it while passing this way from Newark." Wallace was insensible to the pelting of the elements; his unsubdued spirit neither wanted rest for mind nor body; but the broken voice and lingering step of Edwin, who had severely sprained his foot in the dark, penetrated his heart; and notwithstanding that the resolute boy, suddenly rallying himself, declared that he was

neither weary nor in pain, Wallace, seeing he was both, yielded a sad consent to be conducted from the storm. "But not," said he, "to the house. We will go into the barn; and there, on dry earth we may gratefully repose."

Monteith did not oppose him further, and pushing open the door, Wallace and Edwin entered. Their conductor soon after followed with a light from the cottage, and pulling down some heaped straw, strewed it on the ground for a bed. "Here I shall sleep like a prince!" cried Edwin, throwing himself along the scattered truss. "But not," returned Monteith, "till I have disengaged you from your wet garments, and preserved your arms and brigandine from the rust of this night." Edwin, sunk in weariness, said little in opposition, and having suffered Monteith to take away his sword and to unbrace his plated vest, dropped at once on the straw in a profound sleep.

Wallace, that he might not disturb him by debate, yielded to the request of Monteith, and having resigned his armour also, waved him a good night. Monteith nodded the same, and closed the door upon his victims.

Well known to the generals of King Edward as one who estimated his honour as a mere counter of traffic, Sir John Monteith was considered by them all as a hireling fit for any purpose. Though De Warenne had been persuaded to use unworthy means to intimidate his great opponent, he would have shrunk from being a coadjutor of treachery. His removal from the lord-wardenship of Scotland, in consequence of the wounds he had received at Dalkeith, opened a path to the elevation of Aymer de Valence. And when he was named viceroy in the stead of De Warenne, he told Edward that if he would authorise him to offer an earldom, with adequate estates, to Sir John Monteith, the old friend of Wallace, he was sure so rapacious a chieftain would put that formidable Scot into the hands of England. To incline Edward to the proffer of so large a bribe, some proofs of his devotion to England were mentioned by De Valence. "You mean his devotion to money," replied the king, "and if that will make him ours at this crisis, give him overflowing coffers, but no earldom! Though I must have the head of Wallace, I would not have one of my peers show a title written in his blood. Ill deeds must sometimes be done, but we do not emblazon their perpetrators!"

De Valence having received his credentials, sent Haliburton (a Scottish prisoner, who bought his liberty too dear by such

an embassy), to impart to Sir John Monteith the King of England's proposal. Monteith was then castellain of Newark, where he had immured himself for many months, under a pretence of the re-opening of old wounds; but the fact was, his treasons were connected with so many accomplices, that he feared some disgraceful disclosure, and therefore kept out of the way of exciting public attention. Avarice was his master passion, and his history was a series of secret treacheries to Scotland, and in return for them, an accumulation of wealth from England, the contemplation of which seemed to be his sole enjoyment. This new offer from De Valence was greedily embraced. He happened to be at Rutherglen when Haliburton brought the proposal, and in the cloisters of its church was its fell agreement signed. He transmitted an oath to De Valence that he would die or win his hire. And immediately despatching spies to the camp at Roslyn, as soon as he was informed of Wallace's disappearance, he judged, from his knowledge of that chief's retentive affections, that whithersoever he intended finally to go, he would first visit Elderslie and the tomb of his wife. According to this opinion he planted his emissaries in favourable situations on the road, and then proceeded himself to intercept his victim at the most probable places. Not finding him at Bothwell, he was issuing forth to take the way to Elderslie, when the object of his search presented himself at the opening of the wood. The evil plan too well succeeded.

Triumphant in his deceit, this master of hypocrisy left the barn, in which he had seen Wallace and his young friend lie down on that ground from which he had determined they should never more arise. Aware that Wallace would never allow himself to be taken alive, he had stipulated with De Valence that the delivery of his head should entitle him to a full reward. From Rutherglen to Lumloch no place had presented itself in which he thought he could so judiciously plant an ambuscade to surprise Wallace. And in this village he had stationed so large a force of ruthless savages (brought for the occasion by Haliburton from the Irish island of Rathlin), that their employer had hardly a doubt of this night being the last of his too-trusting friend's existence. These Rathliners neither knew of Wallace nor his exploits; but the lower order of Scots, however they might fear to succour his distress, loved his person and felt so bound to him by his actions, that Monteith durst not apply to any one of them to second his villany.

Midnight passed, and yet he could not summon courage to lead his men to their nefarious attack. Twice they urged him before he arose from his affected sleep—for sleep he could not; guilt had “murdered sleep!” and he lay awake, restless, and longing for the dawn,—and yet, ere that dawn, the deed must be accomplished! A cock crew from a neighbouring farm. “That is the sign of morning, and we have done nothing,” exclaimed a surly ruffian, who leaned on his battle-axe in an opposite corner of the apartment “No: it is the signal of our enemy’s captivity!” cried Monteith. “Follow me, but gently. If ye speak a word, or a single target rattle, before ye all fall upon him, we are lost! It is a being of supernatural might, and not a mere man, whom you go to encounter. He that first disables him shall have a double reward.”

Stealing cautiously out of the cottage, the party advanced with noiseless steps towards the barn. Monteith paused at the door, making a sign to his men to halt while he listened. He put his ear to a crevice, not a murmur was within. He gently raised the latch, and setting the door wide open, with his finger on his lip, beckoned his followers. The moon shone full into the hovel, and shed a broad light upon their victims. The innocent face of Edwin rested on the bosom of his friend, and the arm of Wallace lay on the spread straw with which he had covered the body of his companion. So fair a picture of mortal friendship was never before beheld. But the hearts were blind which looked on it, and Monteith gave the signal. He retreated out of the door, while his men threw themselves forward to bind Wallace where he lay; but the first man, in his eagerness, striking his head against a joist in the roof, uttered a fierce oath. The noise roused Wallace, whose wakeful senses had rather slumbered than slept, and opening his eyes, he sprang on his feet. A moment told him enemies were around. Seeing him rise they rushed on him with imprecations. His eyes blazed like two terrible meteors, and, with a sudden motion of his arm, he seemed to hold the men at a distance, while his god-like figure stood a tower in collected might. Awe-struck, they paused, but it was only for an instant. The sight of Edwin, now starting from his sleep, his aghast countenance, while he felt for his weapons, his cry when he recollected they were gone, inspired the assassins with fresh courage. Battle-axes, swords, and rattling chains, now flashed before the eyes of Wallace. The pointed steel in

many places entered his body, while, with part of a broken bench, which chanced to lie near him, he defended himself and Edwin from this merciless host. Edwin, seeing naught but the death of his friend before his sight, regardless of himself, made a spring from his side, and snatched a dagger from the belt of one of the murderers. The ruffian instantly caught the intrepid boy by the throat, and in that horrible clutch would certainly have deprived him of life had not Wallace seized the man in his arms, and with a pressure that made his mouth and nostrils burst with blood, compelled him to forego his hold. Edwin released, Wallace dropped his assailant, who, staggering a few paces, fell senseless to the ground, and instantly expired.

The conflict now became doubly desperate—Edwin's dagger twice defended the breast of his friend. Two of the assassins he stabbed to the heart. "Murder that urchin!" cried Monteith, who, seeing from without the carnage of his men, feared that Wallace might yet make his escape. "Hah!" cried Wallace, at the sound of Monteith's voice giving such an order—"then we are betrayed—but not by heaven! Strike that youth," cried he, "and you will incur damnation!" He spoke to the winds. They poured towards Edwin; Wallace, with a giant's strength, dispersed them as they advanced; the beam of wood fell on the heads, the breasts of his assailants. Himself bleeding at every pore, felt not a smart while yet he defended Edwin. But a shout was heard from the door, a faint cry was heard at his side. He looked around. Edwin lay extended on the ground, with an arrow quivering in his breast, his closing eyes still looked upwards to his friend. The beam fell from the hands of Wallace. He threw himself on his knees beside him. The dying boy pressed his hand to his heart, and dropped his head upon his bosom. Wallace moved not, spoke not. His hand was bathed in the blood of his friend, but not a pulse beat beneath it; no breath warmed the paralysed chill of his face, as it hung over the motionless lips of Edwin. The men were more terrified at this stillness than at the prowess of his arm, and stood gazing at him in mute wonder. But Monteith, in whom avarice had destroyed every perception of humanity, sent in other ruffians with new orders to bind Wallace. They approached him with terror; two of the strongest stealing behind him, and taking advantage of his face being bent upon that of his murdered Edwin, each in the same moment seized his hands. As they

gripped them fast, and others advanced eagerly to fasten the bands, he looked calmly up, but it was a dreadful calm ; it spoke of despair, of the full completion of all woe. "Bring chains," cried one of the men, "he will burst these thongs."

"You may bind me with a hair," said he ; "I contend no more." The bonds were fastened on his wrists ; and then, turning towards the lifeless body of Edwin, he raised it gently in his arms. The rosy red of youth yet tinged his cold cheek ; his parted lips still beamed with the same ; but the breath was flown. "O ! my best brother that ever I had !" cried Wallace in a sudden transport, and kissing his pale forehead, "My sincerest friend in my greatest need ! In thee was truth, manhood, and nobleness ; in thee was all man's fidelity with woman's tenderness. My friend, my brother, oh ! would to God I had died for thee !"

CHAPTER LXXVI.

HUNTINGTOWER.

LORD RUTHVEN was yet musing on Wallace's sudden adieu, and the confirmation which Grimsby and Hay had brought of his determined exile, when he was struck with new consternation by the flight of his son. A billet, which Edwin had left with Scrymgeour, told his father that he was gone to seek their friend, and to unite himself for ever to his fortunes.

Bothwell, not less eager to preserve Wallace to the world, with an intent to persuade him to at least abandon his monastic project, set off direct for France, hoping to arrive before his friend, and engage the French monarch to assist in preventing so grievous a sacrifice. Ruthven, meanwhile, fearful that Wallace and Edwin might fall into the hands of the venal wretches now widely dispersed to seize the chief and his adherents, sent out the Lanark veterans, in divers disguises, to pursue the roads it was probable he might take, and, finding him, guard him safely to the coast. Till Ruthven should receive accounts of their success, he forbore to forward the letter which Wallace had left for Bruce, or to increase the solicitude of the inhabitants of Huntingtower with any intimation of what had happened. But on the fourth day, Scrymgeour and his party returned with the horrible narrative of Lumloch.

After the murder of his friend, Wallace had been loaded with irons, and conveyed unresistingly on board a vessel, to be

carried without loss of time to the Tower of London. Sir John Monteith attended as the accuser, who was to swear away his victim's life. The horror and grief of Ruthven at these tidings were unutterable; and Scrymgeour, to turn the tide of the bereaved father's thoughts to the inspiring recollection of the early glory of his son, proceeded to narrate—that he found the beauteous remains in the hovel, but bedecked with flowers by the village girls. To bury him in so obscure a spot Scrymgeour would not allow, and he had sent Stephen Ireland with the corse to Dumbarton, with orders to see him entombed in the chapel of that fortress. “It is done,” continued the worthy knight, “and those towers he so bravely scaled will stand for ever the monument of Edwin Ruthven.” “Scrymgeour,” said the stricken father, “the shafts fall thick upon us, but we must fulfil our duty.” Cautious of inflicting too heavy a blow on his wife and Helen, he commanded Grimsby and Hay to withhold from everybody at Huntingtower the tidings of its young lord's fate; but he believed it his duty not to delay the letter of Wallace to Bruce, and the dreadful information to him of Monteith's treachery. Ruthven ended his short epistle to his wife by saying he should soon follow his messenger, but that at present he could not abandon the lowlands to even a temporary empire of the seditious chiefs.

On Grimsby's arrival at Huntingtower he was conducted immediately to Bruce. Some cheering symptoms having appeared that morning, he had just exchanged his bed for a couch when Grimsby entered the room. The countenance of the honest Southron was the harbinger of his news. Lady Helen started from her seat, and Bruce, stretching out his arm, eagerly caught the packets the soldier presented. Isabella inquired if all were well with Sir William Wallace, but ere he could make an answer, Lady Ruthven ran breathless into the room holding out the opened letter brought by Hay to her. Bruce had just read the first line of his, which announced the captivity of Wallace, and with a groan that pierced through the souls of every one present, he made an attempt to spring from the couch, but in the act he reeled, and fell back in a fearful but mute mental agony. Helen looked with speechless inquiry upon her aunt and Grimsby. Isabella and Ercildown hastened to Bruce, and Lady Ruthven being too much appalled in her own feelings to think for a moment on the aghast Helen, hurriedly read to her from Lord Ruthven's letter the brief

but decisive account of Wallace's dangerous situation—his seizure and conveyance to the Tower. Helen listened without a word—her heart seemed locked within her—her brain was on fire—and gazing fixedly on the floor while she listened, all else that was transacted around her passed unnoticed.

The pangs of a convulsion fit did not long shackle Bruce. The energy of his spirit struggling to gain the side of Wallace in this his extremest need, roused him from his worse than swoon. Dashing away the restoratives he would have leaped on the floor had not Ercildown held him down. "Withhold me not!" cried he; "this is not the time for sickness and indulgence. My friend is in the fangs of the tyrant, and shall I lie here? No, not for all the empires in the globe will I be detained another hour."

Isabella, terrified at the perils attendant on his resolution, threw herself at his feet, and implored him to stay for her sake. "No," cried Bruce, "not for thy life, Isabella, which is dearer to me than my own! not to save this ungrateful country from the doom it merits would I linger one moment from the side of him who has fought, bled, and suffered for me and mine, who is now treated with ignominy, and sentenced to die for my delinquency! Had I consented to proclaim myself on my landing, secure with Bruce the king, envy would have feared to strike! but I must first win a fame like his! And while I lay here they tore him from the vain and impotent Bruce! But, Almighty pardoner of my sins!" cried he, with vehemence, "grant me strength to wrest him from their gripe, and I will go barefoot to Palestine to utter all my gratitude!"

Isabella sunk weeping into the arms of her aunt. And Ercildown urged the personal danger to which the prince's resentment would expose him. At this, Bruce, stung to the soul that such an argument could be expected to have weight with him, solemnly bent his knee, and clasping his sword, vowed before heaven, "either to release Wallace or——" to share his fate! he would have added; but Isabella, watchful of his words, suddenly interrupted him, throwing herself wildly on his neck, and exclaiming, "Oh! say not so! Rather swear to pluck the tyrant from his throne, that the sceptre of my Bruce may bless England, as it will yet do this unhappy land!" "She says right!" ejaculated Ercildown, in a prophetic transport; "and the sceptre of Bruce, in the hands of his offspring, shall bless the united countries to the latest

generations ! The walls of separation shall be thrown down, and England and Scotland be one people."

Bruce looked steadfastly on the sage : " Then if thy voice utter verity, it will not again deny my call to wield the power that heaven bestows ! I follow my fate ! To-morrow's dawn sees me in the path to snatch my best treasure, my counsellor, my guide, from the judgment of his enemies—or woe to England, woe to all Scotland born who have breathed one hostile word against his sacred life ! Helen, dost thou hear me ? " cried he : " Wilt thou not assist me to persuade thy sister that her Bruce's honour lives in the preservation of his friend ? Speak to her, counsel her, Helen, and, please the Almighty arm of heaven, I will reward thy tenderness with the return of Wallace ! "

Helen gazed intently on him while he spoke. She smiled when he ended, but she did not answer, and there was a vacancy in the smile that seemed to say she knew not what had been spoken. Without further regarding him, she arose and left the room. At this moment of fearful abstraction, her whole soul was bent, with an intensity that touched on madness, on the execution of a project which had rushed into her mind the moment she heard of Wallace's captivity and destination.

The approach of night favoured her design. Hurrying to her chamber, she dismissed her maids with the prompt excuse that she was ill, and desired not to be disturbed till morning, then bolting the door, she quickly habited herself in the page's clothes which she had so carefully preserved as the dear memorial of her happy days in France, and dropping from her window into the pleasance beneath, ran swiftly towards Dundee. Before she arrived at Perth, her tender feet became so blistered she found the necessity of stopping at the first cottage. But her perturbed spirits rendered it impossible for her to take rest, and she answered the hospitable offer of its owner, with a request that he would go into the town and immediately purchase a horse to carry her that night to Dundee.

An hour before dawn she arrived within view of Dundee harbour. At this sight she threw herself off the panting animal, and leaving it to rest and liberty, hastened to the beach. A gentle breeze blew freshly from the north-west, and several vessels were heaving their anchors to get under weigh. " Are any," demanded she, " bound for the Tower of London ? " " None," were the replies. Despair was now in her heart. But suddenly recollecting that in dressing herself for flight she had

not taken off the jewels she usually wore, she exclaimed with renovated hope, "Will not gold tempt some one to carry me thither?" A rough Norwegian sailor jumped from the side of the nearest vessel, and answered in the affirmative. "My life," rejoined she, "or a necklace of pearls shall be yours the moment you land me at the Tower of London." The man, seeing the youth and agitation of the seeming boy, doubted his power to perform so magnificent a promise, and was half inclined to retract his assent, but Helen pointing to a jewel on her finger as a proof that she did not speak of things beyond her reach, he no longer hesitated; and pledging his word that, wind and tide in his favour, he would land her at the Tower Stairs, she sprang into his vessel. The sails were unfurled, the voices of the men chanted forth their cheering responses on clearing the harbour, and Helen, throwing herself along the floor of her cabin, silently breathed her thanks to God for being launched on the ocean, whose waves she trusted would soon convey her to Wallace: to soothe, to serve—to die, or to compass the release of him who had sacrificed more than his life for her father's preservation—for him who had saved herself from worse than death.

CHAPTER LXXVII.

THE THAMES.

ON the evening of the fourteenth day the little ship of Dundee entered on the bright bosom of the Nore, and while Helen sat on the deck watching the progress of the vessel, she first saw the majestic waters of the Thames. At a certain point the captain of the vessel spoke through his trumpet to summon a pilot from the land. The Englishman took the helm, Helen was reclined on a coil of ropes near him. He entered into conversation with the Norwegian, and she listened in speechless attention. The captain had made some unprincipled jest on the present troubles of Scotland. In answer the Englishman mentioned the capture of the renowned champion of Scotland.

"I was present," continued the pilot, "when the brave Scot was put on the raft, which carried him through the Traitor's Gate into the Tower. His hands and feet were bound with iron, but his head, owing to faintness from the wounds he had received at Lumloch, was so bent down, that I could not see his face. There was a great pause, for none of us could shout over the downfall of so merciful a conqueror. Many were

spectators of this scene whose lives he had spared on the fields of Scotland, and my brother was amongst them. However, that I might have a distinct view of the man who has so long held our monarch in dread, I went to Westminster Hall on the day appointed for his trial. The great judges of the land, and almost all the lords besides were there. But when the hall door was opened, and the prisoner appeared, then it was that I saw true majesty. King Edward on his throne never looked with such a royal air. Though pale with loss of blood, and his countenance bore traces of the suffering occasioned by his wounds, his head was now erect, and he looked with undisturbed dignity on all around. Earl Gloucester sat on the right of the Lord Chancellor. Bishop Beck, the Lords de Valence and Soulis, with one Monteith (who it seems was the man that betrayed him into our hands), charged him with high treason against the life of King Edward and the peace of his Majesty's realms of England and Scotland. Grievous were the accusations brought against him, and bitter the revilings with which he was denounced as a traitor too mischievous to deserve any show of mercy. The Earl of Gloucester at last rose indignantly, and called on Sir William Wallace, by the reverence in which he held the tribunal of future ages, to answer for himself!

“‘On this adjuration, brave earl!’ replied he, ‘I will speak!’ O! men of Scotland, what a voice was that! In it was all honesty and nobleness! and a murmur arose from some who feared its power, which Gloucester was obliged to check by exclaiming—‘Silence, while Sir William Wallace answers. He who disobeys, sergeant-at-arms, take into custody!’ A pause succeeded, and the chieftain denied the possibility of being a traitor where he never had owed allegiance. But with a matchless fearlessness, he avowed the facts alleged against him, which told the havoc he had made of the English on the Scottish plains, and the devastations he had afterwards wrought in the lands of England. ‘It was a son,’ cried he, ‘defending the orphans of his father from the steel and rapine of a treacherous friend! It was the sword of restitution gathering on that false friend’s fields the harvests he had ravaged from theirs!’ He spoke more and nobly—too nobly for them who heard him. They rose to a man to silence what they could not confute; and the sentence of death was pronounced on him—the cruel death of a traitor! The Earl of Gloucester turned pale, but Wallace was unmoved. As he was led forth, I followed,

and saw young Le de Spencer, with several other reprobate gallants of our court, ready to receive him. With shameful mockery they threw laurels on his head, and with torrents of derision, told him it was meet they should so salute the champion of Scotland! Wallace glanced on them a look which spoke pity rather than contempt; and, with a serene countenance, he followed the warden towards the Tower. The hirelings of his accusers loaded him with invectives as he passed along; but the populace, with those individuals who had heard of—while many had felt—his generous virtues, deplored his sentence. To-morrow at sunrise he dies.”

As soon as he had uttered the last dreadful words, Helen started from her seat; her horror-struck senses apprehended nothing further, and turning to the Norwegian, “Captain,” cried she, “I must reach the Tower this night!” “Impossible!” was the reply: “the tide will not take us up till to-morrow at noon.” “Then the waves shall!” cried she, and frantically rushing towards the ship’s side, she would have thrown herself into the water had not the pilot caught her arm. “Boy!” said he, “are you mad?” “No,” interrupted she, wringing her hands, “but in the Tower I must be this night, or,—Oh! God of mercy, end my misery!” The unutterable anguish of her voice, countenance, and gesture, excited a suspicion in the Englishman, that this youth was connected with the Scottish chief; and in a different tone he exhorted Helen to composure, and offered her his own boat, which was then towed at the side of the vessel, to take her to the Tower. Helen grasped the pilot’s rough hand, and pressed it to her lips; then forgetful of her engagements with the man who stood unmoved by his side, sprang into the boat. The Norwegian followed her, and in a threatening tone demanded his hire. She now recollected it, and putting her hand into her vest, gave him the string of pearls which had been her necklace. He was satisfied, and the boat pushed off.

At last the awful battlements of England’s state prison rose before her. She could not mistake them. “That is the Tower,” said one of the rowers. A shriek escaped her, and covering her face with her hands, she tried to shut from her sight those very walls she had so long sought. They imprisoned Wallace! and their presence paralysed her heart!

“Shall I die before I reach thee, Wallace?” was the question her almost fitting soul uttered, as she, trembling, yet with

swift steps, ascended the stone stairs which led from the water's edge to the entrance of the Tower. One of the boatmen, being bargeman to the governor of the Tower, as a privileged person conducted her unmolested through every ward till she reached the place of her destination. There she dismissed him, with a ring from her finger as his reward ; and passing a body of soldiers, who kept guard before a low porch that led to the dungeons, she entered and found herself in an immense paved room. A single sentinel stood at the end, near to a small portcullis : there, then, was Wallace ! Forgetting her disguise and situation in the frantic eagerness of her pursuit, she hastily advanced to the man : " Let me pass to Sir William Wallace ! " cried she, " and treasures shall be your reward ! " " Whose treasures, my pretty page ? " demanded the soldier ; " I dare not, were it at the suit of the Countess of Gloucester herself." " O ! " cried Helen, " for the sake of a greater than any countess in the land, take this bracelet and let me pass ! "

The man, misapprehending the words, at sight of the diamonds, supposing the page must come from the good queen, no longer demurred. Putting the bracelet into his bosom, he whispered Helen, that as he granted this permission at the risk of his life, she must conceal herself in the interior chamber of the prisoner's dungeon should any person from the warden visit him during their interview. She readily promised this ; and he informed her that, when through this door, she must cross two other apartments, the bolts to the entrances of which she must undraw ; and then, at the extremity of a long passage, a door, fastened by a latch, would admit her to Wallace. With these words the soldier removed the bars, and Helen entered.

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

THE TOWER OF LONDON.

HELEN's fleet steps carried her in a few minutes through the intervening dungeons to the door which would restore to her eyes the being with whose life her existence seemed blended. The iron latch gave way ; she looked forward, and beheld the object of her solicitude leaning along a couch ; a stone table was before him, at which he seemed writing. He raised his head at the sound. The peace of virtue was in his eyes, and a smile on his lips, as if he had expected some angel visitant.

The first glance at his pale countenance struck to the heart of Helen ; veneration, anguish, shame, all rushed on her at once. She was in his presence ! but how might he turn from consolations he had not sought ! The intemperate passion of her step-mother now glared before her ; his contempt of the countess's unsolicited advances appeared ready to be extended to her rash daughter-in-law ; and with an irrepressible cry Helen would have fled, but her failing limbs bent under her, and she fell senseless into the dungeon. Wallace started from his reclining position. He thought his senses must deceive him—and yet the shriek was Lady Helen's. He had heard the same cry on the Pentland Hills ; in the chamber of Chateau Galliard ! He arose agitated ; he approached the prostrate youth, and bending took off the Norman hat ; he parted the heavy locks which fell over her brow, and recognised the features of her who alone had ever shared his meditations with his Marion. He sprinkled water on her face and hands ; he touched her cheek ; it was ashy cold, and the chill struck to his heart. "Helen !" exclaimed he ; "Helen, awake ! Speak to thy friend !"

Still she was motionless. "Dead !" cried he, with increased emotion. "Blessed angel !" cried he, clasping her to his breast, "take me, take me with thee !" The pressure, the voice, roused Helen. With a torturing sigh she unsealed her eyes from the death-like load that oppressed them, and found herself in the arms of Wallace.

All her wandering senses now rallied, and smote her to the soul. Though still overwhelmed with grief at the fate which threatened to tear him from her and life, she wondered how she could ever have so trampled on the modesty of her nature, as to have brought herself thus into his presence ; and in a voice of despair, believing that she had for ever destroyed herself in his opinion, she exclaimed, "O ! Wallace ! how came I here ? I am lost—and innocently ; but God—the pure God ! can read the soul !" She lay in hopeless misery on his breast, with her eyes again closed, almost unconscious of the support on which she leaned. "Lady Helen," returned he, "was it other than Wallace you sought in these dungeons ? I dared to think that the Parent we both adore had sent you hither to be His harbinger of consolation !" Recalled to self-possession by the kindness of these words, Helen turned her head on his bosom, and in a burst of grateful tears, hardly articulated, "And will you not abhor me, for this act of madness ? But I was not myself.

And yet, where should I live or die but at the feet of my benefactor ? ” The steadfast soul of Wallace was subdued by this language, and the manner of its utterance. It was the disinterested dictates of a pure though agitated spirit which he now was convinced did most exclusively love him, with the passion of an angel, and the tears of a sympathy which spoke their kindred natures stole from his eyes as he bent his cheek on her head. She felt them ; and rejoicing in such an assurance that she yet possessed his esteem, a blessed calm diffused itself over her mind, and raising herself, she exclaimed, “ Then you do understand me, Wallace ? you pardon this apparent forgetfulness of my sex, and recognise a true sister in Helen Mar ? I may administer to that noble heart till——” she paused, turned deadly pale, and then clasping his hand in both hers, in bitter agony added, “ till we meet in heaven ! ”

“ And blissful, dearest saint, will be our union there,” replied he, “ where soul meets soul, unencumbered by these earthly fetters, and mingles with each other, even as thy tender tear-drops now glide into mine ! But there, my Helen, we shall never weep. No heart will be left unsatisfied ; no spirit will mourn in unrequited love, for that happy region is the abode of love—of love without the defilements or the disquietudes of mortality, for there it is an everlasting, pure enjoyment. It is a full, diffusive tenderness, which, penetrating all hearts, unites the whole in one spirit of boundless love in the bosom of our God ! ”

“ Ah ! ” cried Helen, throwing herself on her knees, “ join, then, your prayers with mine, that I may be admitted into such blessedness ! Petition our God to forgive me, and do you forgive me that I have sometimes envied the love you bear your Marion ! But I now love her so entirely, that to be hers and your ministering spirit in Paradise would amply satisfy my soul.” “ O ! Helen,” cried Wallace, grasping her uplifted hands in his, and clasping them to his heart, “ thy soul and Marion’s are indeed one, and as one I love ye ! ”

This declaration almost overpowered Helen in its flood of happiness ; and, with a smile, which seemed to picture the very heavens opening before her, she turned her eyes to a crucifix which stood on the table, and bowing her head on its pedestal, was lost in the devotion of rapturous gratitude.

At this juncture, when, perhaps, the purest bliss that ever descended on woman’s heart now glowed in that of Helen,

the Earl of Gloucester entered. At sight of him Wallace, pointing to the kneeling Helen, beckoned him into the inner cell, where his straw pallet lay, and there, in a low voice, declared who she was, and requested the earl to use his authority to allow her to remain with him to the last.

"After that," said he, "I rely on you, generous Gloucester, to convey safely back to her country a being who seems to have nothing of earth about her but the terrestrial body which enshrines her angelic soul!"

The sound of a voice speaking with Wallace aroused Helen from her happy trance. Alarmed that it might be the fatal emissaries of the tyrant, come prematurely to summon him to his last hour, she started on her feet. "Where are you, Wallace?" cried she, looking distractedly around; "I must be with you even in death!"

Hearing her cry he hastened into the dungeon, and relieved her immediate terror by naming the Earl of Gloucester, who followed him. The conviction that Wallace was under mortal sentence now glared upon her with redoubled horrors. This world again rose before her in the person of Gloucester. It reminded her that she and Wallace were not yet passed into the hereafter, whose anticipated reunion had wrapt her in such sweet elysium. He had yet the bitter cup of death to drink to the dregs, and all of human weakness again writhed within her bosom. "And is there no hope?" faltered she, looking earnestly on the disturbed face of Gloucester, who had bowed with a pitying respect to her as he approached her. And then, while he seemed hesitating for an answer, she more firmly, but imploringly, resumed—"Oh, let me seek your king? once he was a crusade prince. The cross was then on his breast, and the love of Him who came to redeem lost man, nay, even His direst enemies, from death unto life, must have been then in your king's heart. Oh, if once there, it cannot be wholly extinguished now! Let me, gracious earl, but recall to him that he was then beloved by a queen who to this day is the glory of her sex. On that spot of holy contest she preserved his life from an assassin's poison, by daring the sacrifice of her own! But she lived to bless him, and be blessed herself! While Sir William Wallace, also a Christian knight, hath only done for his own country and its trampled land what King Edward then did for Christendom in Palestine. And he was roused to the defence by a deed worse than ever

infidel inflicted ! The wife of his bosom—who had all of an angel about her but that of her mortal body—was stabbed by a murderous Southron governor in Scotland because she would not betray her husband ! I would relate this on my knees to Edward, and call on the spirit of his queen to enforce my suit, by the memory of her love and her devotedness.”

“Dearest sister of my soul !” cried Wallace, who had forborne to interrupt her, taking her clasped hands in his, “thy knees shall never bend to any less than to the blessed Lord of all mankind, for me ! I am content to go, my sister—and angels whisper me, that thy bridal bed will be in William Wallace’s grave !”

Gloucester contemplated this chaste union of two spotless hearts with an admiration almost amounting to devotion. “Noble lady,” said he, “the message that I came to impart to Sir William Wallace bears with it a show of hope ; and I trust that your gentle spirit will yet be as persuasive as consolatory. A deputation has just arrived from our border-counties, headed by the good Barons De Hilton and De Blenkinsopp, praying the royal mercy for their gallant foe, who had been most generous to them, they set forth, in their extremity. And the king was listening to them, with what temper I know not, when a private embassy, as opportunely, made its appearance from France, on the same errand ; in short, to negotiate with Edward for the safety of our friend, as a prince of that realm. I left the ambassadors,” continued the earl, turning to Wallace, “in debate with his majesty, and he has at length granted a suspension—nay, has even promised a repeal of the horrible injustice, that was to be completed to-morrow, if you can be brought to accord with certain proposals now to be laid before you. Accept them, and Edward will comply with all King Philip’s demands in your behalf.”

“Then you will accept them !” cried Helen, in a tumult of suspense. The communication of Gloucester had made no change in the equable pulse of Wallace, and he replied, with a look of tender pity upon her animated countenance, “The proposals of Edward are too likely to be snares for that honour which I would bear with me uncontaminated to the grave. Therefore, dearest consoler of my last hours, do not give way to hopes which a greater King than Edward may command me to disappoint.” Helen bowed her head in silence. The colour again faded from her cheek, and despair once more seized on her heart.

Gloucester resumed ; and after narrating some particulars concerning the conference between the king and the ambassadors, he suggested the impracticability of secretly retaining Lady Helen for any length of time in the state dungeon. "I dare not," continued he, "be privy to her presence here and yet conceal it from the king. I know not what messengers he may send to impart his conditions to you, and should she be discovered, Edward, doubly incensed, would tear her from you, and, as an accessory, so involve me in his displeasure, that I should be disabled from serving either of you further. Were I so to honour his feelings as a man as to mention it to him, I do not believe that he would oppose her wishes ; but how to reveal such a circumstance with any regard to her fame I know not, for all are not sufficiently virtuous to believe her innocence." Helen hastily interrupted Gloucester. "When I entered these walls the world and I parted for ever. The good or the evil opinion of the impure in heart can never affect me—they shall never see me more. The innocent will judge me by themselves, and by the end of my race. I came to minister with a sister's duty to my own and my father's preserver, and while he abides here I will never consent to leave his feet. When he goes hence, if it be to bless mankind again, I shall find the longest life too short to pour forth all my gratitude, and for that purpose I will dedicate myself in some nunnery of my native land. But should he be taken from a world so unworthy of him, soon, very soon, I shall cease to feel its aspersions in the grave."

"No aspersions which I can avert, dearest Helen," cried Wallace, "shall ever tarnish the fame of one whose purity can only be transcended by her who is now made perfect in heaven ! Consent, noblest of women, to wear for the few days I may yet linger here, a name which thy sister angel has sanctified to me. Give me a legal right to call you mine, and Edward himself will not dare to divide what God has joined together !"

Helen paused. Did she hear aright ! and was she indeed going to invade the rights of the wife she had so often vowed to regard as the sole object of Wallace's dearest wishes ? Oh, no ; it was not the lover that shone in his luminous eyes—it was not the mistress that glowed in her bosom. Words might be breathed, but no change would be wrought in the souls of them who were already separated from the earth. With

these thoughts Helen turned towards Wallace ; she attempted to answer, but the words died on the seraphic smile which beamed upon her lips, and she dropped her head upon his breast.

Gloucester, who saw no other means of ensuring to his friend the comfort of her society, was rejoiced at this mutual resolution. He had longed to propose it, but considering the peculiarities of their situation, knew not how to do so without seeming to mock their fate. It was now near midnight, and having read the consent of Helen in the emotion which denied her speech, he quitted the apartment to summon the confessor of the warden to unite their hands.

On his re-entrance, he found Helen sitting, dissolved in tears, with her hand clasped in his friend's. The sacred rite was soon performed which endowed her with all the claims upon Wallace which her devoted heart had so long contemplated with resigned hopelessness—to be his helpmate on earth, his partner in the tomb, his dear companion in heaven ! With the last benediction she threw herself on her knees before him, and put his hand to her lips in eloquent silence. Gloucester, with a look of kind farewell, withdrew with the priest.

“Thou noble daughter of the noblest Scot !” said Wallace, raising her from the ground, “this bosom is thy place, and not my feet. Long it will not be given me to hold thee here ; but in the hours or years of our separation my spirit will hover near thee, to bear thine to our everlasting home.”

The heart of Helen alternately beat violently, and stopped, as if the vital currents were suddenly impeded. Hope and fear agitated her by turns, but clinging to the flattering ideas which the arrival of the ambassadors had excited, she timidly breathed a hope that, by the present interference of King Philip, Edward might not be found inexorable.

“Disturb not the composure of your soul by such an expectation,” returned Wallace ; “I know my adversary too well to anticipate his relinquishing the object of his vengeance but at a price more infamous than the most ignoble death. Therefore, best-beloved of all on earth ! look for no deliverance for thy Wallace but what passes through the grave ; and to me, dearest Helen, its gates are on golden hinges turning, for all is light and bliss which shines on me from within their courts !”

Helen's thoughts could not wrest themselves from the direful images of his execution ; she shuddered, and in faltering accents replied, “Ah ! could we glide from sleep into so

blessed a death, I would hail it even for thee! But the threatened horrors, should they fall on thy head, will in that hour, I trust, also divorce my soul from this grievous world!"

"Not so, my Helen," returned he, "keep not thy dear eyes for ever fixed on the appendages of death. The scaffold and the grave have naught to do with the immortal soul; it cannot be wounded by the one nor confined by the other. And is not the soul thy full and perfect Wallace? It is that which now speaks to thee—which will cherish thy beloved idea for ever. Lament not, then, how soon this body, its mere apparel, is laid down in the dust. But rejoice still in my existence, which through Him Who 'led captivity captive,' will never know a pause! Comfort then thy heart, my soul's dear sister, and sojourn a little while on this earth, to bear witness for thy Wallace to the friends he loves."

While they thus poured into each other's bosoms the ineffable balm of friendship's purest tenderness, the eyes of Wallace insensibly closed. "Your gentle influence," gently murmured he, "brings that sleep to my eyelids which has not visited them since I first entered these walls. Like my Marion, Helen, thy presence brings healing on its wings." "Sleep, then," replied she, "and Marion's angel spirit will keep watch with mine."

CHAPTER LXXIX.

THE STATE DUNGEON.

FROM profound repose Wallace was awakened by the entrance of Gloucester. Helen had just sunk into a slight slumber, but the first words of the earl aroused her, and rising, she followed her beloved Wallace to his side.

Gloucester put a scroll into the hand of Wallace. "Sign that," said he, "and you are free. I know not its contents, but the king commissioned me, as a mark of his grace, to be the messenger of your release."

Wallace read the conditions, and the colour deepened on his cheek as his eyes met each article. "He was to reveal the asylum of Bruce; to forswear Scotland for ever; and to take an oath of allegiance to Edward, the seal of which should be the English earldom of Cleveland!" Wallace closed the parchment. "King Edward knows what will be my reply, I need not speak it." "You will accept his terms?" asked the earl.

"Not to ensure me a life of ages, with all earthly bliss

my portion! I have spoken to these offers before. Read them, my noble friend, and then give him as mine the answer that would be yours." Gloucester obeyed; and while his eyes were bent on the parchment, those of Helen were fixed on her husband; she looked into his very soul, and saw the sublime purpose that consigned his unbending head to the scaffold. When Gloucester had finished, covered with the blush of shame, he crushed the disgraceful scroll in his hand, and exclaimed, with honourable vehemence, against the deep duplicity, and deeper cruelty, of his father-in-law, so to mock by base subterfuges the embassy of France and its noble object.

"This is the morning in which I was to have met my fate!" replied Wallace. "Tell this tyrant that I am even now ready to receive the last stroke of his injustice. In the grave, my Helen," added he, turning to her, who sat pale, "I shall be beyond his power!" Gloucester walked the room in great disturbance of mind, then stopped suddenly before them: "That the king did not expect your acquiescence without some hesitation I cannot doubt, for when I informed him the Lady Helen Mar, now your wife, was the sharer of your prison, he started, and told me, that should you still oppose yourself to his conditions, I must bring her to him, who might, perhaps, be the means of persuading you to receive his mercy."

"Never!" replied Wallace; "I reject what he calls mercy. He has no rights of judgment over me, and his pretended mercy is an assumption which, as a true Scot, I despise. He may rifle me of my life, but he shall never beguile me into any acknowledgment of an authority that is false. No wife, nor aught of mine, shall ever stand before him as a suppliant for William Wallace. I will die as I have lived, the equal of Edward in all things but a crown, and his superior in unblemished honour!"

Finding the Scottish chief not to be shaken in this determination, Gloucester, humbled to the soul by the base tyranny of his royal father-in-law, soon after withdrew to acquaint that haughty monarch with the ill-success of his embassy. But ere noon had turned, he reappeared, with a countenance declarative of some distressing errand.

"I come," said Gloucester, "not to urge you to send Lady Helen as a suitor to King Edward, but to spare her the misery of being separated from you while life is yours." He then

said that the French ambassadors were kept in ignorance of the conditions which were offered to the object of their mission ; and on being informed that he had refused them, they showed themselves so little satisfied with the sincerity of what had been done, that Edward thought it expedient to conciliate Philip by taking some pains to dislodge their suspicions. To this effect he proposed to the French lords sending his final propositions to Sir William Wallace by that chieftain's wife, who he found was then his companion in the Tower. "On my intimating," continued the earl, "that I feared she would be unable to appear before him, his answer was, 'Let her see to that ; such a refusal shall be answered by an immediate separation from her husband.'"

"Let me in this demand," cried she, turning with collected firmness to Wallace, "satisfy the will of Edward. It is only to purchase my continuance with you. Trust me, noblest of men ; I should be unworthy of the name you have given me could I sully it in my person by one debasing word or action to the author of all our ills !" "Ah ! my Helen," replied he, "what is it you ask ? Am I to live to see a repetition of the horrors of Elderslie ?" "No, on my life," answered Gloucester ; "in this instance I would pledge my soul for King Edward's manhood. His ambition might lead him to trample on all men, but still for woman he feels as becomes a man and a knight."

Helen renewed her supplications ; and Wallace gave an unwilling consent to what might seem a submission on his part to an authority he had shed his blood to oppose. "But not in these garments," said he ; "she must be habited as becomes her sex and her own delicacy."

Anticipating this propriety, Gloucester had imparted the circumstance to his countess, and she had sent a casket, which the earl himself now brought in from the passage. Helen retired to the inner cell, and hastily arranging herself in the first suit that presented itself, reappeared in female apparel, and wrapped in a long veil. As Gloucester took her hand to lead her forth, Wallace clasped the other in his, "Remember, my Helen," cried he, "that on no terms but untrammelled freedom of soul will Wallace accept of life. This will not be granted by the man to whom you go ; therefore speak and act in his presence as if I were beyond the skies."

After an absence of two hours, she returned to the dungeon of Wallace ; and as her trembling form was clasped in his

arms, she exclaimed, in a passion of tears, "Here will I live, here will I die! They may sever my soul from my body, but never again part me from this dear bosom!"

"Never, never, my Helen!" said he. Her senses seemed fearfully disordered. While she clung to him, and muttered sentences of an incoherency that shook him to the soul, he cast a look of such expressive inquiry upon Gloucester, that the earl could only answer by hastily putting his hand on his face to hide his emotion. At last, the tears she shed appeared to relieve the excess of her agonies, and she gradually sunk into calm. Then rising from her husband's arms, she seated herself on his stony couch, and said in a firm voice, "Earl, I can now bear to hear you repeat the last decision of the King of England."

Though not absolutely present at the interview between his sovereign and Lady Helen, from the anteroom Gloucester had heard all that passed. Edward's proposals to Helen were as artfully couched as deceptive in their design. Their issue was to make Wallace his slave, or to hold him his victim. In his conference with her, he addressed the vanity of an ambitious woman; then, all the affections of a devoted heart; he enforced his arguments with persuasions and threats. In the last he called up every image to appal the soul of Helen; but, steadfast in the principles of her lord, while ready to sink under the menaced horrors of his fate, she summoned all her strength to give utterance to her last reply.

"Mortal distinctions, King of England!" cried she, "cannot bribe the wife of Sir William Wallace to betray his virtues. His life is dear to me, but his immaculate faith to his God and his lawful prince are dearer. I can see him die and live—for I shall join him triumphant in heaven, but to behold him dishonour himself, to counsel him so to do, is beyond my power—I should expire with grief in the shameful moment!"

Wallace, exulting in her conduct, pressed her hand silently but fervently to his lips. The earl resumed, but, observing the agonies of her mind, he strove to soften the blow he must inflict in the remainder of his narrative.

"Dearest lady," said he, rather addressing her than Wallace, "to convince your suffering spirit that no earthly means have been left unessayed to change the unjust purpose of the king, know that when he quitted you I left in his presence the queen and my wife, both weeping tears of disappoint-

ment. When I found that arguments could no longer avail, I implored him, by every consideration of God and man, to redeem his honour, sacrificed by the unjust decree pronounced on Sir William Wallace. My entreaties were repulsed with anger, for the sudden entrance of Lord Athol with fresh fuel to his flame, so confirmed his direful resolution that, desperate for my friend, I threw myself on my knees. The queen, and then my wife, both prostrate at his feet, enforced my suit, but all in vain; his heart seemed hardened by our earnestness; and his answer, while it put us to silence, granted Wallace a triumph even in his dungeon:—"Cease!" cried the king, "Wallace and I have now come to that issue where one must fall. I shall use my advantage, though I should walk over the necks of half my kindred to accomplish his fate. I can find no security on my throne, no peace in my bed, until I know that he, my direst enemy, is no more."

"Sorry am I, generous Gloucester," interrupted Wallace, "that for my life you have stooped your knee to one so unworthy of your nobleness. Let, then, his tyranny take its course. But its shaft will not reach the soul his unkingly spirit hopes to wound. The bitterness of death was past when I quitted Scotland. And for this body, he may dishonour it, mangle its limbs, but William Wallace may then be far beyond his reach." Gloucester gazed on him, doubting the expression of his countenance. It was calm, but pale even to a marble hue. "Surely," said he, "my unconquered friend will not now be forced to self-violence?" "God forbid!" returned Wallace: "suspect me not of such vassalage to this poor tabernacle of clay. Did I believe it my Father's will that I should die at every pore I would submit, for so his immaculate Son laid down His life for a rebellious world. And is a servant greater than his master, that I should say, Exempt me from this trial? No! I await His summons, but He strengthens my soul by an assurance I feel here," added Wallace, laying his hand on his breast, "that the cord of Edward shall never make my free-born Scottish neck feel its degrading touch." His pale cheek was now luminous with a bright smile as he pressed his swelling heart.

With reawakened horror Helen listened to the words of Wallace, which referred to the last outrage to be committed on his sacred remains. She recalled the threats of the king, and again losing self-possession, starting wildly up, exclaimed,

“And is there no humanity in that ruthless man! O!” cried she, tearing her eyes from the beloved form on which it had been such bliss to gaze, “let the sacrifice of my life be offered to this cruel king, to save from indignity——” She could add no more, but dropped on the arm of Wallace.

Gloucester understood, and he revived her by a protestation, that the clause she so fearfully deprecated had been repealed by Edward. But in this instance he said what was not the truth. The arrival of Athol from Scotland with advices from the Countess of Strathearn, that Lady Helen Mar had fled southward to raise an insurrection in favour of Wallace, and that Lord Bothwell had gone to France to move Philip to embrace the same cause, gave Edward so apt an excuse for giving full way to his hatred against the Scottish chief, that he pronounced an order for the immediate and unrestricted execution of his sentence.

When Gloucester found the impossibility of obtaining respite from the murderous decree, he attempted to prevail for the remission of the last clause, which ordered that his friend’s body should be dismembered, and his limbs sent, as terrors to rebellion, to the four capital fortresses of Scotland. Edward spurned at this petition with even more acrimony than he had done the prayer for his victim’s life, and Gloucester then, starting from his knee, in a burst of honest indignation, exclaimed, “Oh! king, remember what is done by thee this day. Refusing to give righteous judgment in favour of one who prefers virtue to a crown and life! Insincere as secret have been your last conditions with him, but they will be revealed when the great Judge that searcheth all men’s hearts shall cause thee to answer for this matter at the dreadful day of universal doom. Thou hast now given sentence on a patriot and a prince, and then shall judgment be given on thee!”

“Dangerous indeed is his rebellious spirit,” cried Edward, in almost speechless wrath, “since it affects even the duty of my own house! Gloucester, leave my presence, and on pain of your own death, dare not to approach me till I send for you to see this rebel’s head on London Bridge.”

To disappoint the revengeful monarch of at least this object of his malice, Gloucester was now resolved, and imparting his wishes to the warden of the Tower, who was his trusty friend, he laid a plan accordingly.

Helen, however, had believed his declaration to her, and

bowed her head, in sign that she was satisfied. The earl, addressing Wallace, continued, "Could I have purchased thy life, thou preserver of mine, with the forfeiture of all I possess, I should have rejoiced in the exchange. But as that may not be, is there aught in the world which I can do to administer to thy wishes?"

"Generous Gloucester!" exclaimed Wallace, "how unwearied has been your friendship! But I shall not tax it much further. I was writing my last wishes when this angel entered my apartment; she will now be the voice of William Wallace to his friends. But still I must make one request to you—one which I trust will not be out of your power. Let this heart, ever faithful to Scotland, be at least buried in its native country. When I cease to breathe, give it to Helen, and she will mingle it with the dust of those I love. For herself, dear Gloucester! ah! guard the purity and life of my best beloved! For there are those who, when I am gone, may threaten both."

Gloucester, who knew that Wallace meant the Lords Soulis and De Valence, pledged himself for the performance of his first request; and for the second, assured him he would protect Helen as a sister. But she, regardless of all other evils than that of being severed from her dearest and best friend, exclaimed in bitter sorrow, "Wherever I am, still and for ever shall all of Wallace that remains on earth be with me. He gave himself to me, and no mortal power shall divide us!"

Gloucester could not reply before the warden, calling to him that the hour of shutting the gates was arrived, compelled him to bid his friend farewell. He grasped the hand of Wallace with a strong emotion, for he knew that the next time he should meet him would be on the scaffold. During this parting, Helen inwardly and earnestly invoked the Almighty to endow her with fortitude to bear the horrors she was to witness, that she might not, by her agonies, add to the tortures of Wallace.

The voice that was ever music to her ears recalled her. He laid his hand on hers, and gazing on her with pity, held such sweet discourse with her on the approaching end of all his troubles, of his everlasting happiness, where "all tears are dried away!" that she listened, and wept, and even smiled. "Yes," added he, "a little while, and my virgin bride shall give me her embrace in heaven; angels will par-

ticipate our joy, and my Marion's grateful spirit join the blest communion ! She died to preserve my life ; you suffered a living death to maintain my honour ! Can I then divide ye, noblest of created beings, in my soul ! Take my heart's kiss, dear Helen—thy Wallace's last earthly kiss !” She bent towards him, and fixed her lips to his. It was the first time they had met ; his parting words still hung on them, and an icy cold ran through all her veins. She felt his heart beat heavily against hers, as he said, “ I have not many hours to be with thee, and yet a strange lethargy overpowers my senses ; but I shall speak to thee again !” He looked on her as he spoke, with such a glance of holy love, that not doubting he was now bidding her indeed his last farewell—that he was to pass from this sleep out of the power of man, she pressed his hand without a word, and as he dropped his head back upon his straw pillow, with an awed spirit she saw him sink to profound repose.

CHAPTER LXXX.

TOWER HILL.

LONG and silently had she watched his rest. So gentle was his breath that he scarcely seemed to breathe ; and often, during her sad vigils, did she stoop to feel the respiration which might still bear witness that his spirit was yet fettered to earth. She tremblingly placed her hand on his heart, and still its warm beats spake comfort to hers. The soul of Wallace, as well as his beloved body, was yet clasped in her arms.

The first rays of the dawn shone upon his peaceful face just as the door opened, and a priest appeared. He held in his hands the sacred host and the golden dove, for performing the rites of the dying. At this sight, the harbinger of a fearful doom, the fortitude of Helen forsook her, and throwing her arms frantically over the sleeping Wallace, she exclaimed, “ He is dead ! his sacrament is now with the Lord of Mercy !” Her voice awakened Wallace ; and Helen seeing, with a wild sort of disappointment, that he, whose gliding to death in his sleep she had even so lately deprecated, now indeed lived to mount the scaffold, fell back with a groan.

Wallace accosted the priest with a reverential welcome, and then turning to Helen, tenderly whispered to her, “ My Helen ! in this moment of my last on earth, O ! engrave on

thy heart, that, in the sacred words of the patriarch Israel, 'I remembered thee in the kindness of thy youth! in the love of thy desolate espousals to me, when thou camest after me into the wilderness, into a land that thou didst not know, and comforted me!' And shalt not thou, my soul's bride, be sacred unto the Lord?—the Lord of the widow and the orphan! To Him I commit thee, in steadfast faith, that He will never forsake thee! Then, O, dearest part of myself, let not the completion of my fate shake your dependence on the only true and Just! Rejoice, that Wallace has been deemed worthy to die for having done his duty. And is not death the door which opens to us immortality? and in that blest moment who will regret that he passed through it in the bloom of his years? Come, then, sister of my soul, and share with thy Wallace the last supper of his Lord; the pledge of the happy eternity to which, by His grace, I now ascend!"

Helen, reawakened to holy confidence by the composure of his manner, obeyed, and they both knelt before the minister of peace. While the sacred rite proceeded, it seemed the indissoluble union of Helen's spirit with that of Wallace—"My life will expire with his!" was her secret response to the venerable man's exhortation to the anticipated passing soul; and when he sealed Wallace with the holy cross, under the last unction, as one who believed herself standing on the brink of eternity, she longed to share also that mark of death. At that moment the toll of a bell sounded from the top of the Tower. The heart of Helen paused. The warden and his train entered. "I will follow him," cried she, starting from her knees, "into the grave itself!"

What was said, what was done, she knew not, till she found herself on the scaffold, upheld by the arm of Gloucester. Wallace stood before her, with his hands bound across, and his noble head uncovered. His eyes were turned upwards, with a martyr's confidence in the Power he served. A silence, as of some desert waste, reigned throughout the thousands who stood below. The executioner approached to throw the rope over the neck of his victim. At this sight Helen with a cry that was re-echoed by the compassionate spectators, rushed to his bosom. Wallace, with a mighty strength, burst the bands asunder which confined his arms, and, clasp ing her to him with a force which seemed to make her touch his very heart, his breast heaved as if his soul were

breaking from its outraged tenement ; and, while his head sank on her neck, he exclaimed, in a low and interrupted voice—" My prayer is heard ! Helen ! life's cord is cut by God's own hand ! May he preserve my country, and—O ! trust from my youth ! " * He stopped—he fell ; and with the shock the hastily erected scaffold shook to its foundation. The pause was dreadful.

The executioner approached the prostrate chief. Helen was still locked close in his arms. The man stooped to raise his victim, but the attempt was beyond his strength. In vain he called on him—to Helen—to separate, and cease from delaying the execution of the law ; no voice replied, no motion answered his loud remonstrance. Gloucester, with an agitation which hardly allowed him power to speak or move, remembered the words of Wallace, " that the rope of Edward would never sully his animate body ! " and, bending to his friend, he spoke ; but all was silent there. He raised the chieftain's head, and, looking on his face, found indeed the indisputable stamp of death. " There," cried he, in a burst of grief, and letting it fall again upon the insensible bosom of Helen—" there broke the noblest heart that ever beat in the breast of man ! "

The priests, the executioners, crowded round him at this declaration. But, while giving a command in a low tone to the warden, he took the motionless Helen in his arms, and, leaving the astonished group round the noble dead, carried her from the scaffold back into the Tower

CHAPTER LXXXI.

THE WARDEN'S APARTMENTS.

ON the evening of the day in which the sun of William Wallace had set for ever on his country, the Earl of Gloucester was imparting to the warden of the Tower his last directions respecting the sacred remains, when the door of the chamber suddenly opened, and a file of soldiers entered. A man in armour, with his visor closed, was in the midst of them. The captain of the band told the warden that the person before him had behaved in a most seditious manner. He first demanded admittance into the Tower ; then, on the sentinel making answer that, in consequence of the execution of the Scottish chief,

* The last words of Wallace were from the 71st Psalm—" My trust from my youth : O Lord God, Thou art my hope unto the end."

orders had been given to "allow no strangers to approach the gates till the following morning," he, the prisoner, burst into a passionate emotion; uttering such threats against the King of England that the captain thought it his duty to have him seized, and brought before the warden.

When the captain ceased speaking, the stranger fearlessly threw up his visor, and exclaimed, "Take me not to your warden only, but to your king; let me pierce his conscience with his infamy—would it were to stab him ere I die!"

In this frantic adjuration, Gloucester discovered the gallant Bruce; and hastening towards him, he dismissed the officer and his guard; and then turning to the warden, "Sir Edward," said he, "this stranger is not less my friend than he was that of Sir William Wallace!" "Then far be it from me, earl, to denounce him to our enraged monarch: I have seen enough noble blood shed already. And though we, the subjects of King Edward, may not call your late friend a martyr, yet we must think his country honoured in so steady a patriot, and may surely wish we had many the like in our own!" With these words the worthy old knight bowed and withdrew.

Bruce, who had hardly heard the warden, turned upon the earl, and, with a bursting heart, exclaimed, "Tell me, is it true? Am I deprived of my best, my dearest friend? And is it, as I am told, that every infernal rigour of the sentence has been executed on that brave and breathless body! Answer me, that I may speedily take my course!" With a quivering lip, but in silence, Gloucester laid his hand upon his arm. Bruce understood what he durst not speak—"I have no friend!" cried he. "Wallace! my dauntless Wallace, thou art rifled from me! And shall I have fellowship with these? No! all mankind are my enemies, and soon will I leave their detested sojourn!"

Gloucester attempted to interrupt him, but he broke out afresh, and with redoubled violence—"And you, earl," cried he, "lived in this realm and suffered such a sacrilege on God's most perfect work! Ungrateful, worthless man! Fill up the measure of your baseness—deliver me to Edward, and let me brave him to his face. Oh! let me die, covered with the blood of thy enemies, my murdered Wallace! that shall be the royal robe thy Bruce will bring to thee!"

Gloucester stood in dignified forbearance under the invectives and stormy grief of the Scottish prince; but when exhausted nature seemed to take rest in momentary silence, he ap-

proached him. Bruce cast on him a lurid glance of suspicion. "Leave me," cried he; "I hate the whole world, and you the worst in it; for you might have saved him, and you did not; you might have preserved his limbs from being made the gazing stock of traitors, and you did not. Away from me, apt son of a tyrant, lest I tear you in piecemeal!" "By the spirit of him whom this outrage on me dishonours, hear my answer, Bruce! And, if not on this spot, let me then exculpate myself by the side of his body, yet uninvaded by a sacrilegious touch." "How?" interrupted Bruce. Gloucester continued: "All that was mortal in our friend now lies in a chamber of this quadrangle. When I could not prevail on Edward to remit the last vengeance of tyrants, I determined to wrest its object from his hands. A notorious murderer died yesterday under the torture. After the inanimate corse of our friend was brought into this house, to be conveyed to the scene of its last horrors, by the assistance of the warden the malefactor's body was conveyed here also, and placed on the traitor's sledge, in the stead of his who was no traitor, and on that murderer most justly fell the rigour of so dreadful a sentence."

The whole aspect of Bruce changed during this explanation, which was followed by a brief account from Gloucester of their friend's heroic sufferings and death. "Can you pardon my reproaches to you?" cried the prince, stretching out his hand. "Forgive, generous Gloucester, the distraction of a severely-wounded spirit!" This pardon was immediately accorded, and Bruce impetuously added, "Lead me to these dear remains, that with redoubled certainty I may strike his murderer's heart! I came to succour him—I now stay to die, but not unrevenged!" "I will lead you," returned the earl, "where you shall learn a different lesson. His soul will speak to you by the lips of his bride, now watching by those sacred relics. Feeble is now her lamp of life, but a saint's vigilance keeps it burning till it may expire in the grave with him she so chastely loved." A few words gave Bruce to understand that he meant Lady Helen Mar, and with a deepened grief when he heard in what an awful hour their hands were plighted, he followed his conductor through the quadrangle.

When Gloucester gently opened the door, which contained the remains of the bravest and the best, Bruce stood for a moment on the threshold. At the further end of the apartment, lit by a solitary taper, lay the body of Wallace on a

bier, covered with a soldier's cloak. Kneeling by its side, with her head on its bosom, was Helen. Her hair hung disordered over her shoulders, and shrouded with its dark locks the marble features of her beloved. Bruce attempted to advance, but he staggered and fell against the wall. She looked up at the noise, but her momentary alarm ceased when she saw Gloucester. He spoke with a tender voice. "Be not agitated, lady; but here is the Earl of Carrick."

"Nothing can agitate me more," replied she, turning mournfully towards the prince, and regarding him with the look of one already an inhabitant of the grave. "Helen!" faintly articulated Bruce; "I come to share your sorrows, and to avenge them." "Avenge them!" repeated she, after a pause, "is there aught in vengeance that can awaken life in these veins again? Let the murderers live in the world they have made a desert by the destruction of its brightest glory, and then our home will be his tomb!" Again she bent her head upon Wallace's cold breast, and seemed to forget that she had been spoken to—that Bruce was present.

"May I not look on him?" cried he, grasping her hand. "Oh! Helen, show me that heroic face, from whose beams my heart first caught the fire of virtue!" She moved, and the clay-hued features of all that was ever perfect in manly beauty met his sight. But the bright eyes were shut; the radiance of his smile was dimmed in death, yet still that smile was there. Bruce remained in a silence only broken by his sighs.

It was an awful and a heart-breaking pause. Helen, who had not wept since the tremendous hour of the morning, now burst into an agony of tears, and the vehemence of her feelings tearing a frame rendered weak unto death by a consuming sickness, which her late exertions and present griefs had made seize on her very vitals, seemed to threaten the immediate extinction of her being. Bruce hurried to her side as she lay almost expiring, upheld by Gloucester. By degrees she recovered, but finding herself removed from the bier she sprung wildly towards it. Bruce caught her arm to support her tottering steps. She looked steadfastly at him, and then at the motionless body. "He is there," cried she, "and yet he speaks not! He soothes not my grief—I weep, and he does not comfort me! And there he lies! O! Bruce, can this be possible? Do I really see him dead? And what is death?" added she, grasping the cold hand of Wallace to her heart.

"Didst thou not tell me, when this hand pressed mine and blessed me, that it was only a translation from grief to joy? And is it not so, Bruce? Behold how we mourn and he is happy! I will obey thee, my immortal Wallace!" cried she, casting her arms about him; "I will obey thee, and weep no more!"

She was silent and calm. And Bruce, kneeling on the opposite side of his friend, listened, without interrupting him, to the arguments which Gloucester adduced to persuade him to abstain from discovering himself to Edward, or even uttering resentment against him, till he could do both as became the man for whom Wallace had sacrificed so much, even till he was King of Scotland. "To that end," said Gloucester, "did this gallant chieftain live. For, in restoring you to the people of Scotland, he believed he was setting a seal to their liberties and their peace. To that end did he die, and in the direful moment uttered prayers for your establishment. Think of this, and let him not look down from his heavenly dwelling and see that Bruce despises the country for which he bled; that the only hope of Scotland has sacrificed himself in a moment of inconsiderate revenge to the cruel hand which broke his dauntless heart!"

Bruce did not oppose this counsel, and as passion passed away, leaving a manly sorrow to steady his determination of revenge, he finally resolved not to allow to Edward the last triumph of finding him in his power.

The earl's next essay was with Helen. He feared that a rumour of the stranger's indignation at the execution, and that the Earl of Gloucester had taken him in charge, might, when associated with the fact of the widow of Sir William Wallace still remaining under his protection, awaken some dangerous suspicion and direct investigations likely to discover the imposition he had put on the executioners of the last clause in his royal father's most iniquitous sentence. He therefore conjured her, if she would yet preserve the hallowed remains from any chance of violence she must consent to immediately leave the kingdom. The valiant and ever faithful heart of Wallace should be her companion; and an English captain who had partaken of his clemency, be her conductor to her native land. To meet objections, he added, "Bruce shall be protected by me with fidelity till some opportunity may offer for his bearing to Scotland the corpse that must ever be considered the most precious relic in his country."

“As heaven wills,” returned she, “so let it be!” and bent her aching head on the dear pillow of her rest—the bosom, which, though cold and deserted by its heavenly inhabitant, was still the bosom of her Wallace! the ravaged temple rendered sacred by the footsteps of a god! For, had not virtue and the soul of Wallace dwelt there? and where virtue is, there abides the Spirit of the Holy One! With these thoughts she passed the remainder of the night in vigils; and they were not less devoutly shared by the chastened heart of the Prince of Scotland.

CHAPTER LXXXII.

HIGHGATE.

THE tidings of the vengeance which Edward had taken against the Scottish nation, by pouring all his wrath upon the head of Wallace, struck like the lightning of heaven through the souls of men. None of either country, but those in the confidence of Gloucester, knew that heaven had snatched him from so vile a death. The English turned, blushing, from each other; and ventured not to breathe the name of a man whose virtues seemed to have found a sanctuary for his fame in every honest heart. But when the news reached Scotland, the indignation was general. All strifes were forgotten, in resentment of the deed. There was not a man, excepting the Cummins, and their coadjutors, Soulis and Monteith, who really had believed that Edward had seriously meant to sentence the Scottish patriot to a severer fate than what he had pronounced against his rebellious vassal, the exiled Baliol. The execution of Wallace, whose offence could only be that of having served his country too faithfully, excited so great an abhorrence in every breast that the whole country rose as one man, threatening to march instantly to London and sacrifice the tyrant on his throne.

At this crisis every heart which secretly rejoiced in the late sanguinary event quailed within its possessor as it anticipated the consequences of the fall of Wallace. At this instant, when the furies armed every clan in Scotland, breathing forth revenge, John Cummin, the regent, stood aghast. He foresaw his own downfall in this reawakened enthusiasm respecting the man whom his treachery had been the first means of betraying to his enemies. Baffled in the aim of his

ambition by the very means he had taken to effect it, Cummin saw no alternative but to throw himself at once upon the bounty of England ; and, to this purpose, he bethought him of the only chance of preserving the power of Edward, and consequently his own, in Scotland. Knowing by past events, that this tempest of the soul could only be maintained to any conclusive injury to England by a royal hand, and that that hand was expected to be Bruce's, he determined at once that the prince should follow the fate of his friend. By the spies which he kept constantly round Huntingtower, he was apprised that Bruce had set off towards London in a vessel from Dundee. On these grounds he sent a dispatch to King Edward, informing him that destiny had established him supreme lord in Scotland, for now its last hope had put himself into his hands. With this intelligence, he gave a particular account of all Bruce's proceedings from the time of his meeting Wallace in France to his present following that chief to London. He then craved his majesty's pardon for having been betrayed into an union with such conspirators, and repeated his hope that the restitution he now made, in thus showing the royal hand where to find its last opponent, would give full conviction of his penitence and duty. He closed his letter by urging the king to take instant measures to disable Bruce from disturbing the quiet of Scotland, or ever again disputing his regal claims !

Gloucester happened to be in the presence when this epistle was read by his majesty. On the suit of his daughter, Edward had been reconciled to his son-in-law ; but when he showed to him the contents of Cummin's letter, with a suspicious smile he said in a loud voice, " In case you should know this new rebel's lurking-place, presume not to leave this room till he is brought before me. See to your obedience, Ralph, or your head shall follow Wallace's."

The king instantly withdrew, and the earl, aware that search would be made through all his houses, sought in his own mind for some expedient to apprise Bruce of his danger. To write in the presence-chamber was impossible ; to deliver a message in a whisper would be hazardous.

In the confusion of his thoughts, the earl turned his eye on Lord Montgomery, who had arrived that very morning from an embassy to Spain. He had heard with unutterable horror the fate of Wallace ; and had arranged with Gloucester to accompany him that evening to pledge his friendship to

Bruce. To Montgomery, then, as to the only one acquainted with his secret, he turned ; and taking his spurs off his feet, and pulling out a purse of gold, he said aloud, and with as easy an air as he could assume—"Here, my Lord Montgomery, as you are going directly to Highgate, I will thank you to call at my lodge ; put these spurs and this purse into the hands of the groom we spoke of ; tell him they do not fit me, and he will know what use to make of them." He then turned negligently on his heel, and Montgomery quitted the apartment.

The apprehension of this young lord was not less quick than the invention of his friend. He guessed that the Scottish prince was betrayed ; and to render his escape the less likely to be traced (the ground being wet and liable to retain impression), before he went to the lodge he dismounted in the adjoining wood, and with his own hands reversed the iron on the feet of the animal he had provided for Bruce. He then proceeded to the house, and found the object of his mission disguised as a Carmelite, and in the chapel paying his adorations to the Almighty Being on whom his whole dependence hung ; and not unaptly at such an hour came one to deliver him from a danger which, unknown to himself, was then within a few minutes of seizing its prey.

Montgomery entered ; and being instantly recognised by Bruce, the prince never doubting a noble heart, stretched out his hand to him. "I take it," returned the earl, "only to give it a parting grasp. Behold these spurs and purse sent to you by Gloucester. You know their use. Without further observation follow me."

Bruce, throwing off his cassock and cowl, appeared in his martial garb ; and bending his knee for a moment on the chancel-stone which covered the remains of Wallace, he followed his friend from the chapel, and thence through a solitary path in the park to the centre of the wood. Montgomery pointed to the horse. Bruce grasped the hand of his faithful conductor—"I go, Montgomery," said he, "to my kingdom. But its crown shall never clasp my brows till the remains of Wallace return to their country. And whether peace or the sword restore them to Scotland, still shall a king's, a brother's friendship unite my heart to Gloucester and to you." While speaking he vaulted into his saddle, and receiving the cordial blessings of Montgomery, touched his good steed with his pointed rowels, and was out of sight in an instant.

CHAPTER LXXXIII.

SCOTLAND—DUMFRIES.

ON the tenth day after Bruce had cast his last look on the capital of England—that scene of his long captivity, of his family's disgrace, of his own eternal regrets—he crossed the little stream which marked the oft-contended barrier-land of the two kingdoms. He there checked his horse, and having alighted, walked by its side, musing on the different feelings with which he now entered Scotland, from the buoyant emotions with which he had sprung on its shore at the beginning of the year. These thoughts had not occupied him long, when he espied a man in the Red Cummin's colours speeding towards the south. He guessed him to be some messenger of the regent to Edward, and throwing himself before the horse, caught it by the bridle, then coolly demanded its rider to deliver to him the despatches which he carried to the King of England. The man refused and tried to trample down his assailant. The manner of the Scot convinced him that his suspicions were right, and with one action he pulled the messenger from his saddle and laid him prostrate on the ground. Again he demanded the papers—"I am your prince," cried he, "and by the allegiance you owe to Robert Bruce, I command you to deliver them into my hands. Life shall be your reward, immediate death the punishment of your obstinacy."

In such an extremity the man taking from his bosom a sealed packet, immediately resigned it. Bruce ordered him to stand before him till he had read the contents. Trembling with terror of this formidable freebooter (for he had no belief that he was the prince of Scotland) the man obeyed; and Bruce breaking the seals, found a long epistle from the regent, urging the expediency of speedily putting Robert Bruce to death; he represented the danger that there was in delay, lest a man royally descended, and so popular as he had become (since it was now publicly understood that he had already fought his country's battles under the name of Sir Thomas de Longueville), should find means of placing himself at the head of so many zealots in his favour. These circumstances would at this juncture (should he arrive in Scotland) turn its growing commotions to the most decisive uses against the English power. The regent concluded with saying, "that the Lords Loch-awe, Douglas, and Ruthven, were come down

from the Highlands to drive out the Southron garrisons, and to repossess themselves of the fortresses of Stirling and Edinburgh. That Lord Bothwell had returned from France with the real Sir Thomas de Longueville, a knight of great valiancy, and that Sir Roger Kirkpatrick, after having massacred half the English castellains in the border counties, was now lying at Torthorald, ready to commence reprisals through the coasts of Galloway. For himself. Cummin told the king he had secretly removed to the Franciscan monastery at Dumfries, where he should most anxiously await his Majesty's pardon and commands." Bruce closed the packet. To prevent his discovery being betrayed ere he was ready to act, he laid his sword upon the shoulder of the man: "You are my prisoner," said he; "but fear not. I only mean to hold you in safety till your master has answered for his treason." The messenger thought whoever this imperious stranger might be, that he saw a truth in his eyes which ratified this assurance, and without opposition he walked before him till they stopped at Torthorald. Night had closed in when Bruce sounded his bugle under the walls. Kirkpatrick answered from the embrasure over the barbican-gate. "None," cried he, "that is not a true Scot need venture his neck within these towers!" "'Tis the avenger of Sir William Wallace," was the reply. The gates flew open at the words, and Kirkpatrick, standing in the archway amid a blaze of torches, received his guest with a brave welcome.

Bruce spoke no more till he entered the banqueting-hall. Three other knights were seated by the table. He turned to Kirkpatrick. "My friend," said he, "order your servants to take charge of yon Scot," pointing to the messenger of Cummin; "and, till I command his release, let him be treated with the lenity which shall ever belong to a prisoner of Robert Bruce!" As he spoke he threw up his visor, and Kirkpatrick, who had heard that the supposed De Longueville was his rightful prince, now recognised the brave foreigner in the stranger before him. Not doubting the verity of his words, he bent his knee with the homage due to his king, and in the action was followed by Sir Eustace Maxwell, Sir James Lindsay, and Adam Fleming, who were the other knights present.

"I come," cried the prince, "in the spirit of the now immortal Wallace, to live or to die with you in the defence of my country's liberties. With such assistance as yours, and with the blessing of heaven on our arms, I hope to redeem

Scotland from the disgrace which her late horrible submission to the tyrant has fastened on her name. But, by resuming these rights, which is now my firm purpose, I open to you a way to recover our hereditary independence. The direful scene just acted on the Tower Hill of London, that horrible climax of Scottish treason! must convince every reasonable mind that all the late misfortunes of our country have proceeded from the base jealousies of its nobles. There, then, let them die; and may the grave of Wallace be the tomb of dissension! Seeing where their own true interests point, surely the chieftains of this land will rally round their lawful prince, who here declares he knows no medium between death and victory!" The spirit with which this address was pronounced, the magnanimity it conveyed, assisted by the graces of his youth and noble deportment, struck the hearts of his auditors, and aroused in double vigour the resentment to which the first tidings of their heroic countryman's fate had given birth. Kirkpatrick needed no other stimulus than his almost idolatrous memory of Wallace, and he listened with ardour to Bruce's exhortation. The prince next disclosed to his friends the particulars of the Red Cummin's treachery—"He now lies at Dumfries!" cried Kirkpatrick; "thither then let us go and confront him with his treason. When falsehood is to be confounded, it is best to grapple with the sorceress in the moment of detection; should we hesitate she may elude our grasp." Dumfries was only a few miles distant, and they might reach its convent before the first matins. Fatigue was not felt by Bruce when in pursuit of a great object; and, after slight refreshment, he and his four determined friends took horse. As they had anticipated, the midnight bell was ringing for prayers when the troop stopped at the Franciscan gate. Lindsay, having been in the Holy Land during the late public struggles, alleged business with the abbot, and desired to see him. On the father's bidding the party welcome, Bruce stepped forward and addressed him:—"Reverend sir, I come from London. I have an affair to settle with Lord Badenoch, and I know by his letters to King Edward that he is lodged in this convent. I therefore demand to be conducted to him." This peremptory requisition, with the superior air of the person who made it, did not leave the abbot room to doubt that he was some illustrious messenger from the King of England, and, with hardly a demur, he left the other knights

in the cloisters of the church while he led the noble Southron (as he thought) to his kinsman.

The treacherous regent had just retired from the refectory to his own apartment as the abbot conducted the stranger into his presence. Badenoch started frowningly from his seat at such unusual intrusion. Bruce's visor was closed; and the ecclesiastic, perceiving the regent's displeasure, dispersed it by announcing the visitant as a messenger from King Edward. "Then leave us together," returned he, unwilling that even this convenient kinsman should know the extent of his treason against his country. The abbot had hardly closed the door, when Bruce, whose indignaat soul burned to utter his full contempt of the wretch before him, advanced to speak; but the cautious Badenoch, fearful that the father might yet be within hearing, put his finger to his lips. Bruce paused, and listened gloomily to the departing steps of the abbot. When they were no more heard, with one hand raising his visor, and the other grasping the scroll of detection—"Thus, basest of the base race of Cummin!" exclaimed he, "you may for a moment elude the universal shame which awaits your crimes."

At sight of the face, on hearing the words of Bruce, the coward uttered a cry of terror, and rushed towards the door. "You pass not here," continued the prince, "till I have laid open all your guilt; till I have pronounced on you the doom due to a treacherous friend and a traitorous subject." "Infatuated Bruce!" exclaimed Badenoch, assuming an air of insulted friendship, now that he found escape impossible; "what false tongue has persuaded you to arraign one who has ever been but too faithfully the adherent of your desperate fortunes? I have laboured in secret, day and night, in your service, and thus am I repaid."

Bruce smiled disdainfully at this poor attempt to deceive him; and, as he stood with his back against the door, he opened the murderous packet, and read from it all its contents. Cummin turned pale and red at each sentence; and at last, Bruce closing it, "Now, then, faithful adherent of Robert Bruce!" cried he, "say what the man deserves who in these blood-red lines, petitions the death of his lawful prince! Oh! thou arch-regicide! Doth not my very look kill thee?"

Badenoch, his complexion turning livid, and his voice faltering, attempted to deny the letter having been his handwriting, or that he had any concern in the former embassy to Edward;

then, finding that these falsehoods only irritated Bruce to higher indignation, and fearful of being immediately sacrificed to his just resentment, he threw himself on his knees and confessing each transaction, implored his life in pity to the natural desire and self-preservation which alone had precipitated him to so ungrateful a proceeding. "Oh!" added he, "even this danger I have incurred upon your account! For your ultimate advantage did I bring on my head the perils which now fill me with dismay! Love alone for you made me hasten the execution of William Wallace, that insidious friend, who would have crept from your bosom into your throne. And then, fear of your mistaking the motives of so good a service, betrayed me to throw myself into the arms of Edward!"

"Bury thyself and crimes, thou foulest traitor, deep in the depths of hell!" cried the prince, starting away with a tremendous gesture. "Out of sight for ever, that I may not pollute these hands with thy monstrous blood!" Till this moment Bruce was ignorant that Badenoch had been an instigator in the murder of Wallace; and forgetting his own personal wrongs in this more mighty injury, he turned from the coward to avoid the self-blame of stabbing an unarmed wretch at his feet. But at that moment Cummin, who believed his doom only suspended, rose from his knee, and drawing his dirk from under his plaid, struck it into the back of the prince. Bruce turned on him with the quickness of thought, "Hah!" exclaimed he, seizing him by the throat, "then take thy fate! This accursed deed hath removed the only barrier between vengeance and thee—thus remember William Wallace!" As the prince spoke he plunged his dagger into the breast of the traitor. Cummin uttered a fearful cry, and rolled down at his feet murmuring imprecations.

Bruce fled from the spot. It was the first time his arm had drawn blood except in the field of battle, and he felt as if the base tide had contaminated his hand. In the cloisters he was encountered by his friends. A few words informed them of what had happened. "Is he dead?" inquired Kirkpatrick. "I can hardly doubt it," answered Bruce. "Such a matter," returned the veteran, "must not be left to conjecture: I will secure him!"* And running forward, he found the wounded regent crawling from the door of the

* In memory of this circumstance the crest of the family of Kirkpatrick is a hand grasping a dagger distilling gout of blood, the motto: "I mak siccar."

cell. Throwing himself upon him without noise, he stabbed him to the heart.

Before the catastrophe was known in the convent, Bruce and his friends had left it some time, and were far on their road to Lochmaben. They arrived before sunrise, and he thence despatched Fleming to Lord Ruthven with a transcript of his designs.

In the same packet he enclosed a letter for the Lady Isabella. It contained his brave resolution: "That, in his present return to Scotland, he did not consider himself merely as Robert Bruce, come to reclaim the throne of his ancestors, but as the executor of the last and dying will of Sir William Wallace, which was—that Bruce should confirm the independence of Scotland, or fall, as Wallace had done, invincible at his post. Till that freedom is accomplished," continued the prince, "I will never shake the purpose of my soul by even one glance at thy beauties. I wooed you as a knight, I will win you as a king; and one day, when no hostile Southron breathes in Scotland, I will demand my sweetest reward, my beloved bride, of her noble uncle. You shall come to me as the angel of peace, and in one hour we will receive the nuptial benediction and the vows of our people!"

CHAPTER LXXXIV.

STIRLING.

THE word of Bruce was as irreversible as his spirit was determined. No temptation could seduce him from the one, no mischance could subdue the other. The standard of liberty had been raised by him on the Carse of Gowrie, and he carried it from east to west, from the most northern point of Sutherland to the walls of Stirling; but there, the garrison which the treason of the late regent had admitted gave a momentary check to his career. The English governor hesitated to surrender on the terms proposed, and while his first flag of truce was yet in the tent of the Scottish monarch, a second arrived to break off the negotiation. Whatever were the reasons for this abrupt determination, Bruce paid him not the compliment of asking, wherefore, but advancing his troops to the Southron outposts drove them in with great loss; and, approaching the lower works of the town by the road of Ballochgilich, so alarmed the governor as to induce him to

send forth several squadrons of horse to stop his progress. Vain was the attempt. They shrank before the resolute prince and his enthusiastic followers. The governor despatched others, and at last marched out himself to their support. No force seemed able to withstand the Scots. The Southron saw himself in the midst of his slain, and deserted by half of his surviving troops. A surrender was now his only resource. His herald sounded a parley. Bruce demanded the unconditional surrender of both the town and citadel. The governor, aware that in his present state there was no alternative, and knowing the noble nature of the prince who made the requisition, yielded to necessity and resigned the whole into his hands.

Next morning Bruce entered Stirling as a conqueror, with the whole of his kingdom at his feet, for, from the Solway Frith to the Northern Ocean, no Scottish town nor castle owned a foreign master. The acclamations of a rescued people rent the skies, and while prayers and blessings poured on him, he did indeed feel himself a king, and that he had returned to the land of his forefathers. While he sat on his proud war-horse, in front of the great gates of the citadel, now thrown wide asunder to admit its rightful sovereign, his noble prisoners came forward. They bent their knees before him ; and delivering their swords, received in return his gracious assurance of mercy. At this moment all Scottish hearts and wishes seemed riveted on their youthful monarch. Dismounting from his steed with the grace that took captive even the souls of his enemies, he raised his helmet from his head as the Bishop of Dunkeld, followed by all the ecclesiastics in the town, came forward to wait upon the triumph of their king.

The beautiful anthem of the virgins of Israel on the conquests of David was chanted forth by the nuns, who, in this heaven-hallowed hour, revisited the world to give the chosen of their land "All hail !"

The words, the scene, smote the heart of Bothwell ; he turned aside and wept. Where were now the buoyant feelings with which he had followed the similar triumph of Wallace into these gates ? "Buried, thou martyred hero, in thy bloody grave !" New men and new services seemed to have worn out remembrance of the past ; but in the memories of even this joyous crowd, Wallace lived ; though like a bright light which had passed through their path, and was gone never more to return.

On entering the citadel, Bruce was informed by Mowbray, the English governor, that he would find a lady there in a frightful state of mental derangement, who might need his protection. A question or two from the victorious monarch told him this was the Countess of Strathearn. On the revolted abthanes having betrayed Wallace and his country to England, the joy and ambition of the countess knew no bounds; and hoping to eventually persuade Edward to adjudge to her the crown, she made it apparent to the English king how useful would be her services in Scotland; while with a plenary though secret mission, she took her course through her native land, to discover who were inimical to the foreign interest, and who likely to promote her own: after this circuit, she fixed her mimic court at Stirling, and living there in regal magnificence, exercised the functions of a vice-queen. At this period intelligence arrived which the governor thought would fill her with exultation, and hastening to declare it, he proclaimed to her that the King of England's authority was now firmly established in Scotland, for that on the twenty-third of August, Sir William Wallace had been executed in London, according to all the forms of law, upon the Tower Hill!

On the full declaration of this event she fell senseless to the floor. It was not until the next morning that she recovered to perfect animation, and then her ravings were horrible and violent. She accused herself of the murder of Sir William Wallace. She seemed to hear him upbraid her with his fate, and her shrieks so fearfully presented the scene of his death before her attendants, that her women fled, and none others of that sex would afterwards venture to approach her. In these fearful moments the dreadful confession of all her premeditated guilt, of her disappointed passion for Wallace, and her vowed revenge, were revealed under circumstances so shocking, that the English governor declared to the King of Scots, while he conducted him towards her apartment, that he would rather wear out his life in a dungeon than endure one hour of her agonies.

There was a dead silence in her chamber as they approached the door. Mowbray cautiously opened it, and discovered the object of their visit. She was seated at the further end of the room on the floor, enveloped in a mass of scarlet velvet she had drawn off her bed; her hands clasped her knees, and she bent forward, with her eyes fixed on the door at which they

entered. Her once dazzling beauty was now transformed to a haggard glare—the terrible lightning which gleamed on the face of Satan when he sat brooding on the burning marl of Tartarus. She remained motionless as they advanced. But when Bruce stopped before her, contemplating with horror the woman whom he regarded as one of the murderers of his most beloved friend, she sprang upon him, and clinging to him, with shrieks buried her head in his bosom, “Save me! save me!” cried she. “Mar drags me down to hell; I burn there, and yet I die not!” Then bursting from Bruce, with an imprecation that froze his blood, she flew to the other side of the chamber, crying aloud, “Thou hast torn out my heart! Fiend, I took thee for Wallace—but I murdered him!” Her agonies, her yells, and her attempts at self-violence, were now so dreadful, that Bruce, raising her bleeding from the hearth on which she had furiously dashed her head, put her into the arms of the men who attended her, and then, with an awful sense of Divine retribution, left the apartment.

CHAPTER LXXXV.

BANNOCKBURN.

THE generality of his prisoners Bruce directed should be kept safe in the citadel, but to Mowbray he gave his liberty, and ordered every means to facilitate the commodious journey of that brave knight, whom he had requested to convey the insane Lady Strathearn to the protection of her husband.

Mowbray accepted his freedom with gratitude, and gladly set forth with his unhappy charge to meet his sovereign. Expectation of Edward’s approach had been the reason of his withdrawing his herald from the camp of Bruce, and though the king did not arrive in time enough to save Stirling, Mowbray yet hoped he might still be continuing his promised march. This anticipation the Southron’s loyalty would not allow him to impart to Bruce, and he bade that generous prince adieu, with the full belief of soon returning to find him the vanquished of Edward.

At the decline of day Bruce returned to his camp to pass the night in the field with his soldiers, intending next morning to give his last orders to the detachments which he meant to send out under Lennox and Douglas, to disperse themselves over the border counties, and there keep station till that peace

should be signed by England which he was determined to compel. Having taken these measures for the security of his kingdom, he had just returned to his tent on the banks of Bannockburn when Grimsby conducted an armed knight into his presence. The light of the lamp which stood on the table, streaming full on the face of the stranger, discovered to the king his English friend, the intrepid Montgomery. With an exclamation of glad surprise, Bruce would have clasped him in his arms, but Montgomery, dropping on his knees, exclaimed, "Receive a subject as well as a friend, victorious prince! I have forsworn the vassalage of the Plantagenets; and thus without title or land, with only a faithful heart, Gilbert Hambleton comes to vow himself yours and Scotland's for ever."

Bruce raised him from the ground, and welcoming him with the warm embrace of friendship, inquired the cause of so extraordinary an abjuration of his legal sovereign. "No light matter," observed the king, "could have so wrought upon Montgomery!"

"Montgomery no more!" replied the earl, with indignant eagerness; "when I threw the insignia of my earldom at the feet of the unjust Edward, I told him that I would lay the saw to the root of the nobility I had derived from his house, and cut it *through*; and that I would sooner leave my posterity without titles and without wealth, than deprive them of real honour.* I have done as I said! And yet I come not without a treasure, for the sacred corse of William Wallace is now in my bark, floating on the waves of the Forth!"

The subjugation of England would hardly have been so welcome to Bruce as this intelligence. He received it with an unutterable look of gratitude. Hambleton continued: "On the tyrant summoning the peers of England to follow him to the destruction of Scotland, Gloucester got excused under plea of illness, and I could not but show a disinclination to obey. This occasioned some remarks from Edward respecting my known attachment to the Scottish cause, and they were so couched as to draw from me this honest answer:—My heart would not permit me to join in the invasion, since I had seen the spot in my own country where inordinate ambition had cut down the flower of all knighthood, because he was a Scot who would not sell his birthright! The king left me in wrath,

* This event is perpetuated in the crest of the noble family of Hamilton in Scotland.

and threatened to make me recant my words ; —I as proudly declared I would maintain them. Next morning, being in waiting on the prince, I found John le de Spencer (the coward who so basely insulted Wallace on the day of his condemnation) sitting with his highness. On my offering the services due from my office, this minion turned on me, and accused me of having declined joining the army for the sole purpose of executing some plot in London, devised between me and my Scottish partisans for the subversion of the English monarchy. I denied the charge. He enforced it with oaths, and I spurned his allegations. The prince, who believed him, furiously gave me the lie, and commanded me as a traitor to leave his presence. I refused to stir an inch till I had made Le de Spencer retract his falsehood. The coward took courage on his master's support, and drawing his sword, in language that would blister my tongue to repeat, threatened to compel my departure. He struck me on the face with his weapon. The arms of his prince could not then save him. I thrust him through the body, and he fell. Edward ran on me with his dagger, but I wrested it from him. Then it was that, in reply to his menaces, I revoked my fealty to a sovereign I abhorred, a prince I despised. Leaving his presence before the fluctuations of so versatile a mind could fix upon seizing me, I hastened to Highgate to convey away the body of our friend from its brief sanctuary. The same night I embarked it and myself on board a ship of my own, and am now at your feet, brave and just king!—no longer Montgomery, but a true Scot in heart and loyalty."

"And as a kinsman, generous Hambledon!" returned Bruce, "I receive and will portion thee. My lands of Cadzow, on the Clyde, shall be thine for ever; and may thy posterity be as worthy of the inheritance as their ancestor is of all my love and confidence."

Hambledon, having received his new sovereign's directions concerning the disembarkation of those sacred remains, which the young king declared he should welcome as the pledge of heaven to bless his victories with peace, returned to the haven where Wallace rested in that sleep which even the voice of friendship could not disturb. At midnight the trumpets of approaching heralds resounded without the camp. Bruce hastened to the council-tent to receive the now anticipated tidings. The communications of Hambledon had given him

reason to expect another struggle for his kingdom, and the message of the trumpets declared it might be a mortal one. At the head of a hundred thousand men, Edward had forced a rapid passage through the lowlands, and was now within a few hours' march of Stirling, fully determined to bury Scotland under her own slain, or, by one decisive blow, restore her to his empire. When this was uttered by the English herald, Bruce turned to Ruthven with an heroic smile: "Let him come, my brave barons, and he shall find that Bannockburn shall page with Cambus-Kenneth!"

The strength of the Scottish army did not amount to more than thirty thousand men. But the relics of Wallace were there! His spirit glowed in the heart of Bruce. The young monarch lost not the advantage of choosing his ground, and, as his power was deficient in cavalry, he so took his field as to compel the enemy to make it a battle of infantry alone.

To protect his exposed flank from the innumerable squadrons of Edward, he dug deep and wide pits near Bannockburn, and having overlaid their mouths with turf and brushwood, proceeded to marshal his little phalanx on the shore of that brook till his front stretched to St. Ninian's Monastery.

The centre was led by Lord Ruthven and Walter Stewart; the right by Douglas and Ramsay, supported by the brave young Gordon with all his clan; and the left was put in charge of Lennox, with Sir Thomas Randolph, a crusade chieftain, who like Lindsay and others, had lately returned from distant lands, and now zealously embraced the cause of his country.

Bruce stationed himself at the head of the reserve; with him were Loch-awe and Kirkpatrick, and Lord Bothwell, with the true De Longueville, and the men of Lanark, all determined to make this division the stay of their little army, or the last sacrifice for Scottish liberty and its martyred champion's corse. There stood the hearse of Wallace, and the royal standard, struck deep into the native rock of the ground, waved its blood-red volumes over his sacred head.

"By that heaven-sent palladium of our freedom," cried Bruce, pointing to the bier, "we must this day stand or fall. He who deserts it murders William Wallace anew!"

At this appeal the chiefs of each battalion assembled round the spot, and laying their hands on the pall, swore to fill one grave with their dauntless Wallace, rather than yield the ground which he had rendered doubly precious by having made

it the scene and the guerdon of his invincible deeds ! When Kirkpatrick approached the side of his dead chief he burst into tears, and his sobs alone proclaimed his participation in the solemnity. The vow was echoed, with mingled cries and acclamations, from the furthest ranks.

"My leader, in death as in life !" exclaimed Bruce, clasping his friend's shroud to his heart : "thy corse shall again redeem the country which cast thee living amongst devouring lions ! Its presence shall fight and conquer for thy friend and king !"

Before the chiefs turned to resume their stations, the abbot of Inchaffray drew near with the mysterious iron box, which Douglas had caused to be brought from St. Fillan's Priory. On presenting it to the monarch, he repeated the prohibition which had been given with it, and added, "Since these canonized relics (for none can doubt they are so) have found protection under the holy arm of St. Fillan, he now delivers them to your majesty to penetrate their secrets, and to nerve your mind with redoubled trust in the saintly host."

"The saints are to be honoured, reverend father, and on that principle I shall not invade their mysteries till the God in whom I trust marks me with more than the name of king ; till, by a decisive victory, he establishes me the approved champion of my country—the worthy successor of him before whose mortal body and immortal spirit I now emulate his deeds. But as a memorial that the host of heaven do indeed lean from their bright abodes to wish well to this day, let these holy relics repose with those of the brave till the issue of the battle."

Bruce, having placed his array, disposed the supernumeraries of his army, the families of his soldiers, and other apparently useless followers of the camp, in the rear of an adjoining hill.

By daybreak the whole of the Southron army came in view. The van, consisting of archers and men-at-arms, displayed the banner of Earl de Warenne ; the main body was led on by Edward himself, supported by a train of his most redoubted generals. As they approached, the Bishop of Dunkeld stood on the face of the opposite hill, between the abbots of Cambuskenneth and Inchaffray, celebrating mass in the sight of the opposing armies. He passed along in front of the Scottish lines barefoot, with the crucifix in his hand, and in few but forcible words, exhorted them by every sacred hope, to fight for their rights, their king, and the corse of William Wallace !

At this adjuration the Scots fell on their knees, to confirm their resolution with a vow. The sudden humiliation of their posture excited an instant triumph in the haughty mind of Edward, and spurring forward, he shouted aloud, "They yield!—they cry for mercy!" "They cry for mercy!" returned Percy, trying to withhold his majesty, "but not from us. On that ground on which they kneel they will be victorious or find their graves."

The king contemned this opinion, and inwardly believing that, now Wallace was dead, he need fear no other opponent (for he knew not that even his cold remains were risen in array against him) he ordered his men to charge. The horsemen, to the number of thirty thousand, obeyed; and rushing forward, with the hope of overwhelming the Scots ere they could rise from their knees, met a different destiny. They found destruction amid the trenches and on the spikes in the way, and with broken ranks and fearful confusion, fell or fled under the weapons which poured on them. De Valence was severely wounded, and being carried off the field, filled the rear ranks with dismay. Bruce seized the moment of confusion, and seeing his army distressed by the arrows of the English, he sent Bothwell round with a resolute body of men to drive those destroying archers from the height which they occupied. This was effected, and Bruce coming up with his reserve, the battle in the centre became close, obstinate, and decisive. Many fell before the determined arm of the youthful king, but it was the fortune of Bothwell to encounter the false Monteith in the train of Edward. The Scottish earl was then at the head of his intrepid Lanark men. "Fiend of the most damned treason," cried he, "vengeance is come!" and with an iron grasp, throwing the traitor into the midst of the faithful clan, they dragged him to the hearse of their chief, and there, on the skirts of its pall, the wretched villain breathed out his treacherous breath under the strokes of a hundred swords. "So," cried the veteran Ireland, "perish the murderers of William Wallace!" "So," shouted the rest, "perish the enemies of the bravest of men—the most loyal of Scots."

The Southron camp, with all its riches, fell into the hands of Bruce. But while his chieftains pursued their gallant chase, he turned his steps from triumph to pay his heart's honours to the remains of the hero whose blood had so often bathed Scotland's fields of victory. So long had been the

glory ! ” Isabella threw herself into his arms and wept aloud. Helen, slowly raising her head at these words, regarded her sister with a look of awful tenderness ; then turning her eyes back upon the coffin, gazed on it as if they would have pierced its confines, and clasping the urn earnestly to her heart, she exclaimed, “ ’Tis come ! the promise—*Thy bridal bed shall be William Wallace’s grave !* ”

Bruce and Isabella, not aware that she repeated words which Wallace had said to her, turned to her with emotion. She understood the terrified glance of her sister, and with a smile which spoke her kindred to the soul she was panting to rejoin, she answered, “ I speak of my own espousals. But ere that moment is—and I feel it near—let my Wallace’s hallowed presence bless your nuptials !—Thou wilt breathe thy benediction through my lips ! ” added she, laying her hand on the coffin, and looking down on it as if she were conversing with its inhabitant.

“ O ! no, no,” returned Isabella, throwing herself on her knees before her sister ; “ Let me be the sharer of your cell, or take me with you to the kingdom of heaven ! ”

“ It is thy sister’s spirit that speaks,” cried Dunkeld, observing the awe which not only shook the tender frame of Isabella, but had communicated itself to Bruce, who stood in heart-struck veneration before the yet unascended angel. “ Holy inspiration,” continued the bishop, “ beams from her eyes, and as ye hope for further blessings obey its dictates.”

Isabella bowed her head in acquiescence. As Bruce approached to take his part in the sacred rite, he raised the hand which lay on the pall to his lips. The ceremony began—was finished ! As the bridal notes resounded from the organ, and the royal pair rose from their knees, Helen held her trembling hands over them. She gasped for breath, and would have sunk without a word, had not Bothwell supported her shadowy form upon his breast. She looked on him with a grateful though languid smile, and with a strong effort spoke : “ Be you blessed in all things as Wallace would have blessed you ! From his side I pour out my soul upon you, my sister—my being !—and, with its inward-breathed prayers to the Giver of all Good for your eternal happiness, I turn, in holy faith—to my long looked-for rest ! ”

Bruce and Isabella wept in each other’s arms. Helen slid gently from the bosom of Bothwell prostrate on the coffin, and

uttering, in a low tone, "I waited only for this!—We have met—I unite thy noble heart to thee again—I claim my brother—at our Father's hands—in mercy!—in love—by His all-blessed Son!" Her voice gradually faded away as she murmured these broken sentences, which none but the close and attentive ear of Bothwell heard. But he caught not the triumphant exclamation of her soul, which spoke, though her lips ceased to move, and cried to the attending angels, "Death, where is thy sting? Grave, where is thy victory?"

In this awful moment the abbot of Inchaffray, believing the dying saint was prostrate in prayer, laid his hand on the iron box, which stood at the foot of Wallace's bier—"Before the sacred remains of the once champion of Scotland, and in the presence of his royal successor," exclaimed the abbot, "let this mysterious coffer of St. Fillan's be opened, to reward the deliverer of Scotland according to its intent!" "If it were to contain the relics of St. Fillan himself," returned the king, "they could not meet a holier bosom than this!" and resting the box upon the coffin, he unclasped the lock, and the regalia of Scotland was discovered! At this sight, Bruce exclaimed, in an agony of grateful emotion, "Thus did this truest of human beings protect my rights, even while the people I had deserted, and whom he had saved, knelt to him to wear them all!" "And thus Wallace crowns thee!" said Dunkeld, taking the diadem from its coffer, and setting it on Bruce's head.

"My husband and my king!" exclaimed Isabella, sinking on her knee before him, and clasping his hand to her lips.

"Hearest thou that, my beloved Helen?" cried Bothwell, touching the clasped hands which rested on the coffin. He turned pale, and looked on Bruce. Bruce, in the glad moment of his joy at this happy consummation of so many years of blood, observed not his glance, but in exulting accents exclaimed, "Look up, my sister! and let thy soul, discoursing with our Wallace, tell him that Scotland is free, and Bruce a king indeed!" She spoke not, she moved not. Bothwell raised her clay-cold face. "That soul has fled, my lord!" said he. "but from you eternal sphere they now together look upon your joys. Here let their bodies rest; for 'they loved in their lives, and in their deaths they shall not be divided!'"

Before the renewing of the moon, whose waning light witnessed their solemn obsequies, the aim of Wallace's life, the object of Helen's prayers, was accomplished. Peace reigned

in Scotland. The discomfited King Edward died of chagrin at Carlisle; and his humbled son and successor sent to offer such honourable terms of pacification, that Bruce gave them acceptance, and a lasting tranquillity spread prosperity and happiness throughout the land.

NOTE RESPECTING THE PERSONAL CONFORMATION OF SIR WILLIAM WALLACE AND KING ROBERT BRUCE.

THE extraordinary bodily as well as mental superiority which Wallace and Bruce possessed over their contemporaries, is thus recorded by Hector Boetius: About the latter end of the year 1430, James I. of Scotland, on returning to Perth, from St. Andrews, found his curiosity excited to visit a very old lady of the house of Erskine, who resided in the castle of Kinnoul. In consequence of her extreme old age she had lost her sight, but all her other senses were entire, and her body was yet firm and active. She had seen William Wallace and Robert Bruce in her earliest youth, and frequently told particulars of them. The king, who entertained a love and veneration for great men, resolved to visit the old lady that he might hear her describe the manners and strength of the two heroes. He therefore sent a message acquainting her that he would come to her the next day. When she was told that the king was approaching, she went down into the hall of her castle, attended by a train of matrons, many of whom were her own descendants. She advanced to meet his majesty so easily and gracefully that he doubted her being blind. At his desire she embraced and kissed him. He took her by the hand, and made her sit down on the seat next him, and then, in a long conference, he interrogated her on ancient matters. Among others, he asked her to tell him what sort of a man William Wallace was; what was his personal figure; what his bearing, and with what degree of strength he was endowed. He put the same comparing questions to her concerning Robert Bruce. "Robert," said she, "was a man beautiful and of a fine appearance. His strength was so great that he could easily have overcome any mortal man of his time, save one—Sir William Wallace! But in so far as he excelled other men, he was excelled by Wallace, both in stature and in bodily strength, for in wrestling Wallace could have overthrown two such men as Robert. And he was comely as well as strong, and full of the beauty of wisdom."

I might have thought, had I known the above record in my young days, when I heard my old friend, Luckie Forbes, describe the Scottish heroes, that she must have been one of those matrons of honour to Lady Kinnoul, and had "seen baith the stalwarth chiefs" in her also venerable life. But the description of my humble historiographer was the work of her own heart, suggested there by tradition, and a holy reverence of even the name of William Wallace to help it out; and so my pen, moved by the same impulse, has attempted to copy the picture she presented.





